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THREE TO ONE

VOL. III.

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THREE TO ONE

OR,

SOME PASSAGES OUT OF THE LIFE OF
AMICIA LADY SWEETAPPLE

BY GEORGE WEBBE DASENT, D.C.L.

AUTHOR OF "ANNALS OF AN EVENTFUL LIFE"

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. III.



LONDON

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THREE TO ONE.

CHAPTER I.

HARRY AND EDWARD AND THE PRICES.

IT was about five o'clock when Harry Fortescue got to No. —, Lupus Street, and the door was opened by Mrs. Nicholson, who was afraid lest her good-for-nothing husband might repeat his raid of the day before, and try to carry off her week's rent as well as "the bank."

It so happened that Harry had hardly ever been at the house before. The Prices had not been long there, and Harry and Edward were too well-bred to weary those whom they befriended with the burden of their presence. It also happened that when Harry had called, Betsy had answered the door. When Mrs. Nicholson saw a very good-looking

young gentleman standing at her door, she thought it must be a mistake, and said—

“Do you want anything, sir?”

“I want to see Miss Price,” said Harry; “is she at home?”

“Miss Price? Yes, sir, Miss Price is at home. May I be so bold as to ask you for your name?”

“My name does not matter,” said Harry.

“Perhaps not to you, sir,” said Mrs. Nicholson; “but it does to me. You must give me your name.”

“I want it for myself,” said Harry, laughing. “Will you go up and tell Miss Price that a gentleman wishes to see her?”

“Certainly, sir,” said Mrs. Nicholson; and then she scaled the staircase, and repeated to Edith the words which Harry had said.

“A gentleman!” said Edith. “You know, Mrs. Nicholson, we see no gentlemen.”

“That’s what I thought, Miss Edith,” said Mrs. Nicholson, “and I telled him as much; but he seems of that kind as won’t take an answer.”

“Every gentleman,” said Edith, “ought to have a card; and if he has no card, he must have a name.”

“Just what I said; Miss Edith. I begged him to

give me his name; and what do you think he said? Why, that he wanted it for himself, in such a pleasant way."

"Please go down and tell him," said Edith, "that I expect visits from no gentlemen. If he is a gentleman he must tell his name, and then I shall be able to say whether I know him."

So down ran Mrs. Nicholson, and found Harry standing in the narrow hall, and seemingly lost in study of the gas-lamp.

"Miss Price, sir, is at home; but she says what I said: before you see her you must give your card or your name."

"Give Miss Price this card," said Harry; "and as you want my name as well, it is Fortescue."

"Oh, Miss Edith," said Mrs. Nicholson, "it's Mr. Fortescue! Isn't that the name of the gentleman you advertised for yesterday, when Mr. Nicholson came and carried off 'the bank'?"

"Pray ask Mr. Fortescue to walk up," said Edith.

So Harry Fortescue was shown up, and soon stood face to face with Edith in that dingy back drawing-room in the lodging-house in Lupus Street. It was very different from the conservatory at High Beech, or from Amicia's exquisite little *boudoir* in Lowndes Street.

Now it would be hard to say which felt most fear on this occasion, Edith or Harry. It is always odious to be the receiver of charity, however delicately and generously bestowed; and the only excuse in Edith's eyes for her mother's consenting to receive those young men's bounty was that bitter necessity which knows no law. It was sour bread, but still it was bread. Besides, was not Edith doing all she could to go out as a governess, and support her mother and sister on the magnificent salary she was sure to command by her talents. She had a natural dignity, too, which supported her under this trial, and she recollected it was not for her sake but that of her poor, feeble, bedridden mother and her little sister. There she stood, dark and lovely, of a very different type of beauty than either Amicia or Florry, but quite as beautiful in her way as either of them. It was more than a year and a half since Harry had seen her, and she was then a beautiful but an unformed girl—something like an unfinished statue, at which a sculptor has worked hard, but left rude and rough; now she was like a cedar which a man has planted and gone away, and returning in two years finds tall and slender, and passed from a shrub into a tree. Up to that Saturday afternoon Harry and Edward had only thought of the Price

family as a whole—as a human trinity consisting of three persons—as an idea, rather than as so many individuals. But as Harry Fortescue now beheld Edith Price, the idea resolved itself into its component parts, and he saw, for the first time, that Edith Price was a very lovely girl of real flesh and blood. He was rather abashed, therefore; but he felt that he had to say something, and he said it.

“I came, Miss Price, to say how sorry I am that the cheque which I sent you miscarried. As soon as I saw your advertisement I returned to town; and in this envelope you will find another cheque, which I hope Mrs. Price will find useful.”

“You are very good, Mr. Fortescue,” said Edith. “Mamma will be so grateful to you.”

“Pray do not say a word about that,” said Harry. “But tell me, how is Mrs. Price?”

“No better, I am afraid,” said Edith sadly. “The doctors from the first said she would never be better. The shock she received by poor papa’s sudden death was too crushing.”

“I am so sorry,” said Harry. Then, seeing that Edith was on the very verge of tears, and that it was only her pride which hindered her grief from gushing out, he rose to depart.

“I am sure, Miss Price, you will not mistake my

motive in intruding on you. I was only anxious that you should know it was neither mine nor Edward Vernon's fault that the cheque which has disappeared so mysteriously never reached you."

"It was very good of you, Mr. Fortescue," said Edith, holding out her hand; "and some day I trust God will enable me to prove to you how grateful I am."

"Not a word of that, if you please," said Harry. "The little that I have done—and you must remember that Edward Vernon shares that little with me—is as much a duty in our eyes as any of the other duties of life which——" Here he paused, not exactly knowing how to finish the sentence, he was so frightened.

"Which other people do not fulfil," said Edith, with a smile through her tears. "That only makes your behaviour and Mr. Vernon's the more noble."

"Good-bye," said Harry, and in another moment his feet were heard by good Mrs. Nicholson creaking down her ill-joined stairs. Before she could run up from her kitchen to let him out, Harry Fortescue had escaped, and was striding down Lupus Street.

"So that's Mr. Fortescue," said Mrs. Nicholson; "and a fine tall gentleman he is, and very good-looking, too. I always did say fine and handsome

men come from the West. We've a proper lot of men down in North Devon."

Nor was she long in running up-stairs to tell Edith her opinion of her visitor.

"I did not like to let him in all at once, Miss Edith. That would not a-been proper, you know, to show a strange gentleman in to a young lady unprotected like you. But I saw at the first glance he was a gentleman born and bred, and so tall and strong, and winsome in the face. He's made many a heart ache, I'll bet a penny; and will make many more ache before he has done. The Fortescues, as I told you, always were a fine, manly race, and now you see it with your own eyes, Miss Edith."

"I have seen Mr. Fortescue before," said Edith, smiling at Mrs. Nicholson's enthusiasm about our hero—if he is our hero—and then she added, "but it was some time ago, when I was quite a child. I think, though, I can say he was always good, and," she added with a little hesitation, "good-looking."

"Why not speak it out-right, Miss Edith?" said honest Mrs. Nicholson. "Even a child might see how handsome Mr. Fortescue is."

"Handsome is that handsome does," said Edith, repeating one of Mrs. Marjoram's favourite pro-

verbs, though not at all in the uncharitable way in which that lady usually applied it.

"I'll be bound he's handsome in deeds as well as in words and looks," said Mrs. Nicholson.

"I have found him so both in words and deeds," said Edith, with a sigh. "I have not had time or opportunity to find him so in looks. Besides, why should I think of his looks?"


"A cat may look at a king, you know," said Mrs. Nicholson; "and, I am sure, as far as looks go, you are a cat that any king might look at."

"If you call me a cat," said Edith, "I'll show you my claws."

"Claws!" said Mrs. Nicholson, taking one of Edith's soft small hands in her red fist—"claws! there's never a claw on this hand to scratch a mouse."

"Yes, but I have claws," said Edith. "If any one ill-treats me, or insults me, I could give them a good scratch. I should like to have scratched Mrs. Boffin only yesterday."

"What's the good of thinking of such low-lived people," said Mrs. Nicholson. "I am sure I pity Mr. Boffin, if so be there be a Mr. Boffin. But I must run down, Miss Edith, and get some tea made for Mrs. Price."



“Stay a moment,” said Edith. “I should be so much obliged to you if you would get this cheque cashed, and pay your rent out of it, and bring the rest to me. I want to pay the weekly bills.”

“Well, I never!” said Mrs. Nicholson, as she went down-stairs with the cheque. “And did all this money come from that handsome young gentleman? Here, you Betsy, you lock the airey-gate, and put up the chain on the street-door; and all you do, never let your father come in, for I’m going off to cash a cheque to pay our rent, and as sure as there’s money in the house on Saturday night he’s sure to smell it out. There’s no scent that lies like money; morning, noon, and night you may smell money and hunt it, though there’s few that are in at the death. Now, you Betsy, do you hear what I was a-saying of?”

“Yes, mother, I mind you,” said the precocious Betsy; “but father will never come to-night or to-day, after he’d got ‘the bank’ yesterday.”

“There’s no telling what a husband will do, I tell you, Betsy. Often an’ often they come like the Day of Judgment, or a thief in the night. No wife’s safe against her husband: that’s the law, Betsy.”

“Then the law ought to be altered,” said Betsy, as her mother was putting on her bonnet and shawl.

“So they have been, Betsy; and what the law now says is, that women have rights. But somehow or other a husband’s law, Betsy, is a natural law above all laws; and the difference between a good husband and a bad one is, that the one rides on the law like a gentleman, and the other rides it to death like a blackguard; but both the bad and the good ride on the law, and the most we poor women can do is to ride behind on a pillion.”

“What’s a pillion, mother?” said Betsy.

“A pillion, Betsy,” said Mrs. Nicholson, “is a kind of a saddle, on which old-fashioned women ride behind their husbands down in the West. You mayn’t ever ride on a pillion, perhaps, but you’ll know what it is to ride behind if you’re ever married—which it will never be, Betsy, if you take my advice.”

“I think,” said Betsy, “it would be better to ride behind than not ride at all, mother.”

“That’s what all silly young chits say that knows no better, Betsy. But you mind the house, and don’t let your father in, if he rings ever so, before I come back.”

“Very good, mother,” said Betsy. And so Mrs. Nicholson went off to cash the cheque.

And now, as the reader has been really very good

and patient, we must take him into our confidence, and tell him how it was that Harry and Edward Vernon undertook the charge of the Price family; but if any reader laughs at our reasons, or even at Harry and Edward, all we can say is, that we hope we shall never write another story for his amusement.

You know—at least, we think you know—that Harry and Edward were at Eton together, where they had done nothing except play at cricket and foot-ball. When they had been at that famous college for more than five years, their guardians—they were both orphans—thought it time they should learn something; so they sent them to a private tutor, to master in two years what they had not learned in five. After much deliberation, the Rev. Mr. Price was chosen, and the two lads, just seventeen, were sent to Bourton Rectory, and confided to his care.

There are some people we know in this silly world who are foolish enough to believe, and even to declare, that no man can ever care for his tutor. That we emphatically deny. It may be true that some men, or even many men, are not fond of their tutors, just as some men do not care for their mothers-in-law, or some step-mothers of their stepsons; but just as some men are very fond of their

mothers-in-law, and some mothers of their step-sons, so some men are fond, and very fond, of their tutors. This was the case with Harry and Edward so far as Mr. Price was concerned. He was in all respects a most charming man and delightful companion. There was no athletic sport in which he did not excel ; and if he did not shoot or hunt, it was only because in that part of the country the clergy had abandoned hunting and shooting for visiting the poor and discharging their duties in other ways. Above all things, and this especially commended him to Harry and Edward, Mr. Price was no "sap." "If a boy has not a natural turn or ability for study," he used to say, "what's the use of driving him on to it? You will only addle the small brains he has got by making him work eight hours a day." Another of his maxims was, that more dunces were made by overwork than by overplay ; and this rule he carried out in his education of Harry and Edward. The result was that in those two years the two lads had made up all the way they had lost at Eton, and when they met up at Oxford fellows who had stayed till the same age at Eton, they were agreeably surprised to find that Mr. Price had taught them a great deal without their being aware of it, and that they passed among the freshmen at

Christ Church as "those two lucky fellows, Harry Fortescue and Edward Vernon." That Harry and Edward were not plucked in any examination at Oxford was all due to Mr. Price, and that they did little or nothing while up at "the House" was not his fault. They were grateful to him as a tutor, and loved him and his family as a friend. Mrs. Price was as a mother to them who had no mother, and his little children, Edith and Mary, were as their sisters. In the vacation they went to stay with them often and often, and all that dread last long vacation, when the terror of approaching "Greats" overshadowed them, they spent at Bourton, "coached," as the phrase is, by Mr. Price. When, therefore, the examination took place in November, 186—, and first Harry Fortescue and then Edward Vernon got his *testamur*—that invaluable document which entitles the happy undergraduate to a degree—they were both delighted, and almost the first thing that Harry said when he knew they were both safe through was—

"I say, Ned, this is all Price's doing. We ought to be eternally obliged to him. We must make him a very handsome present."

They little knew how soon their gratitude would have to be shown.

The December that followed that final examination was very cold. There was skating for weeks. Bourton Mere was a noble sheet of water. If you think by "mere" you have run Bourton to earth or to water in Cheshire you may be right, for there are many meres in that fine county; but then you may also be wrong, for are there not "meres" in other parts of England, and was not Whittlesea Mere a mere till it was drained, not to mention Windermere? But wherever it was, Bourton Mere was deep and broad, more than a mile long, and on it Harry and Edward had learned to skate with Mr. Price. As soon as Christmas was over they were to go down to Bourton to spend a few days, and off they set at the appointed time. The train put them down within a mile of the mere.

"I say, Harry," said Edward, "let us take our skates and walk over to the mere. Our luggage can go over to Bourton in the cart."

"Master's on the mere with Miss Edith," said the boy who drove the cart. "You'll find him there."

Away the young men went, full of life and strength, and reached the mere at racing speed.

"Why, there's no one on the mere but Edith," cried Harry.

“Oh, he’s sure to be there,” said Edward Vernon.
“He’s putting on his skates.”

Mr. Price was there, and he was not putting on his skates. He was under the ice. All that was left of him was his hat floating on a great hole in the ice. The noble spirit was gone never to return.

For a while Harry and Edward did what they could. They got ropes and ladders and all the appliances so useless after an accident. At last, when more than an hour had elapsed, they went home with Edith, who seemed stunned and dazed. All the child could say was, “Where is papa? why does he not return with us?” Poor thing! she was old enough to know why he did not return, but for a while grief had made her silly and childish.

But the bitterest part of all was breaking the sad news to Mrs. Price. At first she was wild with grief. She rushed to the mere, only to get there in time to see the stiff form of her husband dragged from beneath the ice, and to see his staring eyes and blue pinched hands and face. Then she swooned away, and was carried back to bed. Brain fever followed, and the end was partial paralysis, which rendered her bedridden. Thus it may be said that Edith and Mary were robbed of both their parents at once.

In a day or two Harry and Edward went back to town, only to return to the funeral ; and then it came out that Mr. Price had left no provision for his family. He had not long been settled in a college living, and as a tutor he had lived, so far as his pupils were concerned, "not wisely but too well." He had been too liberal and hospitable, in short, and, instead of saving anything, had died in debt. What he had left behind him for his family was worse than nothing. The furniture at the rectory had to be sold to pay the outstanding liabilities ; and last of all, the new rector came in, or his lawyer came in, which is much the same thing, for dilapidations, and all the little surplus was swallowed up.

The day after the funeral the young men went back to town, after taking a tender leave of Edith and Mary. The worst was, the Prices seemed to have no relations. They were as the mushrooms of the earth, which seem to spring from neither flower nor seed. Truly a more desolate family was never seen. But they had a host of friends. Of course, every one in the neighbourhood sympathised with them, but a starving family cannot exist on sympathy alone ; and as for all the old men and women round, clerical as well as lay, they were agreed

that nothing could be done for the family of a man who had been so improvident.

“Depend upon it,” said Mrs. Grimalkin, an old maid who had taken brevet rank—the Grimalkins are a very old family in that, and in fact in all parts of the country—“depend upon it, it runs in the blood. It’s no use helping people who can’t help themselves.”

“Quite so,” said Mrs. Tabby, Mrs. Grimalkin’s first cousin, who had dined ten times every year with the Prices, and only given them one tea in return; “I always set my face against extravagance.” And so between the two the Prices went to the wall.

It was on that cold January night, after the two friends had returned to town, and when they had dined at Mrs. Boffin’s, who had done her best to entertain them, that Harry, who, as our readers must long since have remarked, generally took the lead, said all at once to Edward Vernon—

“Ned, it will never do to let those poor Prices starve. They really do not seem to have a friend in the world.”

“How can we help it?” said Edward.

“Help it! of course we can,” said Harry. “It only needs a little self-denial. What’s your income, Ned?”

"Mine?" said Edward—"mine is £800 a year."

"And mine just under a thousand," said Harry.

"Both are a great deal more than we want."

"I don't know that, either. We haven't much to spare at the end of the year," said Edward.

"That's because we are extravagant, like poor Mr. Price. Besides, recollect, Ned, our education is over; we sha'n't have to pay much more either to 'the House' or the Dons."

"Very true," said Edward; "I never thought of that."

"I'll tell you what, Ned," said Harry—"I'll put aside £175 a year out of my income, if you will say you will give £125; that will be £300 a year—£100 for each of them. What do you say, old fellow? It will be such a pleasure to help them till they can do something for themselves. Depend upon it we shall never feel the want of it."

"With all my heart, Harry," said Edward. "I am sure they need it."

"Then that is settled," said Harry; "and I'll write a letter to Edith Price to-morrow. She can show it to her mother when she gets better."

"It's not so bad after all," said Edward, "to be a younger son; at any rate, you have the command of

your own money, and can do as you like with what you have."

"We won't talk any more about it," said Harry, "or we shall think we are doing some very generous thing. What we do is no more than our duty to the memory of our dear friend."

So they talked no more about it; but the next day Harry Fortescue wrote the nicest letter in the world to Edith Price, who was then about thirteen, and told her all that was needful to be known—how he and Edward Vernon were only discharging a debt of gratitude to the memory of Mr. Price by contributing to the support of his family. She need not trouble herself with sending any reply, but as soon as Mrs. Price was able to attend to anything like business, Edith was to tell her that £300 a year would be placed unto her account at the Bourton Bank, and that it would continue to be paid so long as Mrs. Price needed it. In the meantime £100 had been lodged in the bank, which the family were to consider as the first instalment of the £300. There was a P.S. added, which ran thus:—

"DEAR EDITH,

"If there is anything in this letter which you do not understand, I daresay Mrs. Simpkins, the

curate's wife, will explain it all to you. In the meantime, believe me,

“Very affectionately yours,

“HARRY FORTESCUE.”

It need hardly be said that when Mrs. Price could attend to business she was full of gratitude for the noble offer of Harry and Edward. Her pride, indeed, would have led her to refuse it. But of what use is pride in a mother with two destitute daughters? It is clearly a luxury not to be indulged in. Mrs. Price accepted the first instalment, and the second and the third, and so it had gone on for more than five years. At first they had all lived in a little cottage at Bourton, then they went to France, and learnt French and music, and the £300 a year was quite sufficient for all their wants. But pride, though it had not prevented Mrs. Price from accepting the bounty, forbade Edith to stay any longer in the country or abroad. When she was eighteen she said to her mother—

“Mother, we must leave France and go to London. I must try to do something for myself and the family.”

The invalid, bedridden as she was, protested in

vain. Edith would have her way, and to London they came, and established themselves in Lupus Street, shortly before the visit of the young men to High Beech.

As soon as they came, Harry suggested that it might be more convenient if they had their money by the month instead of by the quarter, as it would save all necessity for keeping any balance in the bank. This arrangement had been accepted with thanks, and so it was that, on the 3rd of June, 1870, the payment for the month which was expected never came.

And now the reader knows all that we know of the relations which existed between Edith Price, or E. P., and Harry Fortescue. It is perfectly true that these relations did not in the least answer to the scandalous suggestions of Mrs. Marjoram, any more than they did to those of Mr. Beeswing's valet or Amicia. That they were perfectly pure and honourable must be plain to every one. That they were absurd and romantic may be very true; but if young men are not to be romantic at the age of twenty-one, when in the world, we should like to know, are they to indulge in the luxury of that delightful feeling? We quite admit that very few men of fifty could have treated themselves to such a pleasure; but

that only shows that men of fifty, ay, and women of that age, have often lost all taste for good works of this kind. The amusing thing was that both Harry and Edward were rather ashamed of what they had done; not of the deed itself, but lest the world should find them out and think them silly. They were both of that nature which led them to

“Do good by stealth and blush to find it fame,”

and so they were always in mortal fear, as the reader may have gathered from the conversation at High Beech, lest their noble act of charity should be detected and exposed. All we can say is, that we hope no man will ever have reason to blush for a more mortal sin than this allowance of £300 a year paid by two young men to a deserving and destitute family. Tastes may differ, but we think, at the Day of Judgment, Harry and Edward will stand for this among the sheep rather than the goats.





CHAPTER II.

HOW THEY GOT ON AT HIGH BEECH.

HAVE you seen Edith?" said Edward to Harry, as soon as he came back.

"Yes, and I have made it all right."

"What a bore that cheque should have miscarried," said Edward.

"That is now cancelled," said Harry; and then he broke out, "Do you know, Ned, Edith Price is a very lovely girl?"

"She always promised to be pretty," said Edward in a half-conscious way, which really meant that he was quite satisfied with the recollection of Alice. "How I wish we were back at High Beech, now that it's all right with Edith."

"Come, come," said Harry, "you had a very jolly time at High Beech, and you know you couldn't stay there for ever."

"But one might have stayed there till Monday," said Edward. "If it hadn't been——"

“For coming to town with me like a good fellow,” said Harry; “but I can’t pity you. Everything seemed to go wrong with me, and everything right with you. You might marry Alice Carlton to-morrow, if it depended on her.”

“And so you might marry Florry, if you chose to ask her; only you’re too proud, and, let me say, a little too fond of making love to two women at once. Depend on it, there is nothing women like less than that; it’s so unsettling.”

“Make love to two women at once!” said Harry. “When did I make love to two women at once?”

“At High Beech,” said Edward. “More than that, you did what is far worse in women’s eyes. You let two women make love to you, and came away without giving either the preference. You’re like a hive of bees that won’t swarm, though the whole parish is after them with pots and pans.”

“But suppose I cared for neither of them,” said Harry, “am I to be carried off without my consent?”

“There’s no good denying it,” said Edward, “for Alice told me one day, ‘I do so wish, Mr. Vernon, that Mr. Fortescue were a little more constant with

Florry. As it is, he flirts sometimes with her and sometimes with Lady Sweetapple.”

“I never did anything of the kind,” said Harry. “I could see that they were neither of them indifferent to me; but I declare I never encouraged either of them.”

“They both thought you liked them, that’s clear,” said Edward.

“Like,” said Harry; “yes, ‘like’ is just the word. I like them both very much; but as for love, I’m not so inflammable as you, Ned. I do not fall over head and ears in love with the first pretty woman I meet.”

“Neither with the first nor with the second either, it appears,” said Edward. “All good things are three, Harry. Beware of the third.”

“Yes, if one only knew where to find her,” said Harry; “but come along, I’m getting hungry. The sooner we get to the club and dine, the better I shall be pleased.”

In half an hour the two friends were seated at the University Club, enjoying their dinner with the appetite of lions. To look at them, none of their acquaintance would ever have fancied that, before coming to that banquet, they had smoothed the pillow of the destitute and afflicted, and that, if any

pair ever deserved to have a good digestion on that 4th of June, 1870, it was Harry Fortescue and Edward Vernon.

While they were dining at the club, the party at High Beech were also seated at dinner. It cannot be said that repast was at all lively. With the departure of Harry and Edward they had lost the spring out of their year, as Mr. Beeswing remarked, quoting Herodotus, though no one detected him save Mr. Sonderling, who had been seen roaming in a demented way through the chase, and caught like a wild animal and made to stay to dinner.

"I must return to endure my state clothing," he remonstrated.

But the plea was not allowed. He was to stay, and stay as he was. He sat opposite to Amicia, and gazed at her as Endymion at the moon. But she was as cold and hard as the full moon in March. Poor Mr. Sonderling, he had almost served her turn. If she could make him keep her secret one day longer, it would be enough. All her thoughts were now with Harry Fortescue; and if thoughts could meet and recognise each other, Amicia's would have met Florry's at Mrs. Boffin's or at the club, and had a battle royal over Harry's body. As for Florry, she stared into space, and said little or nothing,

though Mr. Beeswing tried hard to draw her out. Alice was soft and silent. She had also told Florry that Edward had assured her that the whole mystery about E. P. would soon be cleared up.

"All I know," said Florry, "is that E. P. is Edith Price, for I taxed Harry with it, and he did not deny it. I hate her as much as I hate Lady Sweet-apple."

Mrs. Marjoram talked to Colonel Barker of the Day of Judgment. To her surprise, that gallant veteran did not tremble like Felix, but went so far as to doubt whether the fires on that awful day would equal the cross-fire of the Ram Chowdah's howitzers on the breach of that famous hill fort.

"Such sentiments are downright shocking," said Mrs. Marjoram to Mrs. Barker, after dinner.

"They are very natural, begging your pardon, Mrs. Marjoram, in a military man," replied Mrs. Barker, standing up as usual for her gallant colonel.

As for Lord Pennyroyal, he again plunged into the great sugar question with Lady Carlton, and, as she never contradicted him, he probably thought he was right.

"One lump of sugar in your tea, no debt, and no tubbing," seemed to be the three articles of his charter. Lady Pennyroyal was, as usual, genial and

pleasant. She was altogether the most charitable woman in the world; and if any one made a hole in his manners, or even broke a great social rule, she was the first to run up to him and try to mend it. We forgot to say that on that Saturday night dear Miss Markham reappeared at dinner, to the delight of every one except Mrs. Marjoram, who whispered to Colonel Barker that she was sure "that old maid was an artful, designing person, and in all probability, before she settled down there at High Beech, she had been no better than she should have been."

"Upon my word," said Colonel Barker, "I see nothing in her but a very charming old lady. Don't you remember the way in which she gave us her strawberries? But I forget, you were not of the party."

"I make it a rule," said Mrs. Marjoram, as solemnly as though she were reading the Bible to a band of infidels—"I make it a rule, Colonel Barker, never to countenance with my presence the gathering together of the guilty; and that was why I would not let Mr. Marjoram visit Miss Markham's cottage."

"Do you call us the guilty?" asked Colonel Barker; "for we almost all of us went."

“The present company are always excepted, you know,” said Mrs. Marjoram, “and so you are excepted. But of the rest of the party, I can only say that I consider them false and frivolous.”

“What’s false and frivolous, colonel?” said Mr. Beeswing, tired of his up-hill work with Florry.

“Not you,” said Colonel Barker, “nor Count Pantouffles, nor Mrs. Marjoram, but all the rest of us, it seems, only because we went and ate strawberries at Miss Markham’s.”

“I should call that remark not false and frivolous,” said Mr. Beeswing; “that, perhaps, would be too strong; but certainly frivolous and vexatious.”

“You hear what he says, Mrs. Marjoram,” said Colonel Barker. “He says you are frivolous and vexatious.”

“I am accustomed to be despised,” said Mrs. Marjoram, with the air of a martyr; “but my words are not less true, for all that.”

So she went on snapping and snarling at every one, until the ladies left the men to themselves.

After dinner, Florry and Alice played, but there was no life in them; and Amicia sang, and Mr. Sonderling; but except the German, who was still in his paradise or New Jerusalem of reawakened love,

the "performance," as Florry persisted in calling it, was very flat.

When the singing was over, Mr. Sonderling sat by Amicia, and tried to lead her back to the College of the Deafs and Dumbs, but she was almost as mute as a fish, or as one of her father's former patients.

"There is a time for all things, Mr. Sonderling," she said, "and this is no time to think of Frankfort. I cannot bear it."

"*Ach!*" said the German, "whenever I think on Frankfort it makes me reflect."

Then he said to himself, "If I had only endured my state clothing, I had been more successful."

Silly man! he thought those old wedding clothes were a sort of charm to draw Amicia to him. He did not see that his renewed affection was sheer folly, "*Dummheit*," "*Wahnsinn*," and all the hard words which old Gretchen bestowed on it as she sat by herself knitting worsted stockings in the cottage kitchen.

"We have been rather late for several nights," said Lady Carlton, "and I think we had better have an early one. I hope you do not object, Lady Pennyroyal?"

"Oh, dear no," said Lady Pennyroyal; and so

they sailed off to bed. Nor were the men slow to follow. Lord Pennyroyal was always ready to go to bed, because it saved wax, spermaceti, oil, ozokerit, and tallow, as the case might be. "No one knew," he said, "how much they might save in the year in a large household if they would only go to bed themselves, and see that their servants followed their example, at half-past ten."

"But then there would be no society," said Count Pantouffles—"no balls, no receptions."

"And a very good thing too," said Lord Pennyroyal as he took his candle. "Society, as you call it, is another great evil of the age, and it leads more than anything else to extravagance and ruin."

Unhappy man! How well he would have lived in the deserts of Arabia, where there is no water even to baptize a child, and consequently none to wash with, and so consume soap!

"I shall not be much longer here," said Amicia, as soon as Mrs. Crump left her. "Only one day more—Sunday, that is like the last day in the calendars that children make before they leave school for the holidays. Monday I go back, and on Tuesday I shall see Harry. Of course he will call to see whether Lady Charity will invite the insipid Edward to Ascot. I wish I could see him sooner."

Ah me! Yet, on the whole, things have gone well here—far better than I had any right to expect. I have escaped great dangers by a little—what shall I call it?—management. Yes, management will do, or forethought, or presence of mind, call it what you will. Well, then, deceit? Oh, no, not deceit. Whom have I deceived? Florry Carlton? I only told her Harry was in love with Edith Price, and that was not deceit. He may be, though I don't know it, and"—taking refuge in her glass—"I don't believe it. Well, well, all is fair in war and love, they say; and what is love but war with all the world of women to gain the great object of our ambition—the man we love? And now I will go to bed. I am too sleepy to think any more, not even to smile at poor Carl with his reflections and ridiculous attentions. Poor fellow, he too has served my turn."

After this soliloquy Amicia went to bed, in charity with herself at least, if not with all the rest of the world.

"Alice," said Florry penitentially, "I have been a great fool."

"Indeed I don't see it," said Alice.

"But I feel it," said Florry, "and that's worse than any one else seeing it. I was a great fool to quarrel with Harry Fortescue at the last moment."

"I did not quarrel with Edward," said Alice.

"That's because you were a fool too," said Florry fiercely. "You ought to have quarrelled with him, a man half or three parts engaged to you whom you detect writing to Miss Edith Price."

"Oh, Florry dear," said Alice, drawing her arms round her, "don't scold me so. I couldn't help it."

"I daresay they have both seen her by this time," said Florry savagely.

"I hope they may, if either of them is to see her at all," said Alice. "Men don't make love in pairs."

"Much you know about it, you silly child," said Florry. "For aught I know they do."

Then she went on after a pause—

"Do you know I hate Edith Price even more than I do Lady Sweetapple. I think she's more dangerous."

"That's only because Harry is away, and you think he may have seen her, but Lady Sweetapple is here safe under the same roof, and separated from Harry. You will be quite as jealous as ever of Lady Sweetapple when she goes back to town."

"There's a good deal in that," said Florry; "and now I think of it, I hate them both equally."

"I don't think I hate anybody in the whole world," said Alice. "I know I love Edward, and I

am sure he loves me, and so I can trust him with all the Sweetapples and Edith Prices in the world."

"You are indeed fortunate," said Florry, as she kissed her sister. And so they went to bed—the one to sleep a sweet sleep full of Edward Vernon and happiness; the other to toss and turn about, trying in her dreams to clutch Harry Fortescue, and ever doomed to find some one snatching him away from her.





CHAPTER III.

HARRY AND EDWARD TAKE EDITH AND MARY TO CHURCH.

NEXT day was Sunday. Now, with all our respect for that holy day, it must be confessed that Sunday in London is a dull day. As of the gold of Havilah it is emphatically said "the gold of that land is good," so of Sunday in London it must be as distinctly declared that "it is dull." What do you call "dull?" says some rigid church-goer, who never misses his three full services every Sunday of his life. If we were permitted to answer, we should say, we call what you are in the habit of doing "dull," and we think we can discover the reason why you are so dull in your conversation all the week or your behaviour on Sunday. But that is not the dulness of which we are complaining. It is that when you have been to church once or twice, as every one ought to do on Sunday, there is little or nothing left to be done in London

on Sunday. You may call between the services on your friends, but if they are of the three-service order, ten chances to one you find them at dinner in the middle of the day, and have to overeat yourself to keep them in countenance and company. Or you may call after four o'clock, and then you are sure to find them out. They are, in fact, breathing after the services like yourself; and you would not be so cruel as to deprive them of their natural air, would you?

Well, suppose you don't call, but take a walk in the Park among the rest of the "miserable sinners" who throng it on Sunday afternoon. In no place shall you find the truth of the adage more forcibly brought home to you than that the company of a crowd is dull. However fine the weather be in London on a Sunday, you must always enjoy it with a reservation. If it is fine in town it is sure to be finer in the country; and as man by virtue of his immortal soul—which we had better make the most of as long as Mr. Darwin and his followers allow us to keep it—naturally desires the better and scorns the worse, a fine Sunday in London makes us long to fly away from it into the country. But if you are not content with the Park, you may go to "the Zoo" and see the animals. Yes, and the brutes who

come to stare at them. "You are misanthropic," some one will say. "Not at all. We delight in the company of our species, but not in such specimens of it as we usually meet at the 'Zoo.'" Of course there are nice people there sometimes, but this only adds to your agony when you find you have been there a whole Sunday afternoon and missed them. But a crowd can only be judged by the mass, and of the mass at the Zoo on Sunday afternoons it may be said they might with great propriety change places with the beasts at which they stare. Thus we have seldom seen a finer collection of bears than you may see there any Sunday afternoon. "Male and female?" Yes, male and female. Brown bears, and black bears, and white. There is no danger of the breed dying out: brown bears enough to replenish Lithuania and Wermeland—little child, look out that last place in the map—white bears enough to retire to the Arctic regions and renew the race if ever Polar navigators threaten their extinction. As for owls, we have never seen such a splendid show—eagle owls, with feathers on their heads; screech owls, screaming out their own vulgarity. Geese in such flocks that one is tempted to revive the old Greek oath and swear—only not by them, but at them. Ducks a few, not very many. Cats in quantities—

old cats and young cats—the Honourable Mrs. Grimalkin and Mrs. Tabby amongst them. Apes, a whole wilderness of them. Asses, a much finer show than you will see in the East, walking about free and unsaddled. What shall we say of boars? Never was such an exhibition seen. At the Zoo every Sunday you may literally see the Great Exhibition of Bores of all Nations. There you may see them with necks like cranes—women as long-throated, but not nearly so graceful, as giraffes. Morally speaking, there is no lack of snakes or serpents; still less any deficiency in laughing or crying hyenas; and as for crocodiles, there they are walking about in a way never seen on the banks of old Nile, looking human to the very life with their handkerchiefs up to their eyes. You say this must be all very amusing to those who have eyes to see it. So it may be once or twice; but the society of rational brutes, as they may be called, soon palls on one, and so the Zoo—unless you go to see the beasts, and on Sunday you can't see them because of the crowd of men and women—is, to us at least, the dullest place in the world.

So much for what may be called the amusements of a London Sunday, of which foreigners say they find them as lively as a London fog. In fact, it is hard to say of which disease foreigners die most in

London, our sad Sunday amusements or our London fogs. Both combined are rapidly fatal to most foreign constitutions.

So for a family man, after he has gone to church twice on Sunday, and tried to call at one or two houses, and taken a turn in the Park, and stoutly refused to go to the Zoo, what remains but to go home to an early dinner, say at six, that the cook may go out—and mind, if you do not let her go out, she will be sure to try to poison you all the rest of the week—and then to read a sermon or two after dinner, and retire to bed? All very proper, you say, and decorous; and so do we. We are not about to run down dining at six on Sunday, or sermons, or retiring early to rest. We are not, as other men are, cosmopolitans, frequenters of Pratt's, revellers, and such like: far from it. We only say that such a mode of passing Sunday is rather dull than lively; and that, try to make the best of it, a Sunday in London is always dull as compared with one spent in the country. There is something in the atmosphere of a London Sunday which depresses and darkens our thoughts. All the blacks which in the week are suspended in the air, fall down on that day and stifle us; while, in the country, the pure air and blue sky freshen and brighten us up.

But if these things be so with the father of a family, who can retire, metaphorically, into its bosom, and there as it were Sabbatarianise till Monday comes, what must it be with young men who have no family, and only Mrs. Boffin or the club in whom to seek refuge? The answer can only be, that they find it duller still.

Harry Fortescue and Edward Vernon were therefore dull on that Sunday, the 5th of June, 1870. It was only natural, and they were prepared to go to church and enjoy their Sunday sadly, after the fashion of the town.

With all their dislike for work, they had one redeeming quality. They were early risers, except when they went to balls; then, as we have seen, they got up late, and felt no shame; but on other mornings, when they had taken their proper rest, they were up as fresh as larks, ready to breakfast at nine, and do what was becoming a gentleman during the day.

Another good quality they had, which, we hope, will recommend them to most of our readers. They always went to church. Nay, they did not mind going to church twice, if the sermon was likely to be good, or, better still, if there was no sermon, only prayers. They were High Churchmen—most young

men are nowadays, on the principle, we suppose, of beginning with an exalted standard, that we may not sink too low in after-life. A young man who is a Low Churchman is like a barometer in which the mercury is always at zero. It may fall, but in the nature of things it can never rise. On the whole, therefore, we prefer young men to be High Churchmen ; and if we did not, we could not help it, for, as we have said, Harry and Edward were High Churchmen. Living in that neighbourhood, they went regularly either to St. Paul's, Knightsbridge, or St. Barnabas ; and in this respect they were everything that could be desired. Conscientious Christians, not troubling themselves much with doctrine ; living by faith and showing their faith, as you know they showed it, by their works. They may lapse in some fourth or fifth volume, because neither we nor they are rigid, rasping Calvinists, like Mrs. Marjoram and the Hon. Mrs. Grimalkin ; but down to the very end of this third volume, that is to say, throughout their whole novel life, they were, in spite of their indolence and want of ambition, what most mothers would desire their sons to be, cheerfully religious, perplexed by no doubts, and debased by no bad practices. What more, we ask, could the most anxious parent wish ? Yet Harry and Edward

had no parents. They had no mother to admire them and point to them as a family pattern. Melancholy in that as in so many other things.

After breakfast that morning, some time before they usually started for church, Harry Fortescue suddenly said—

“I think it would be a good thing, Ned, to take those two girls to church.”

“What girls?” said Edward. “They are too far off.”

The silly fellow, you see, was thinking of Florry and Alice, and his heart was at High Beech, though his body was beneath Mrs. Boffin’s roof.

“What girls?” said Harry; “why, Edith and Mary Price, to be sure. I have been thinking a good deal of them since yesterday.”

“But will they like it?” asked Edward.

“Who can tell till we try?” said Harry. “It is surely far better for them to go to church properly protected than to walk through the streets all alone. Edith Price is far too pretty to be left unprotected.”

“But we are not their natural protectors,” said Edward, rallying at once to the standard of Alice like a true knight.

“Yes, we are,” said Harry. “I should like to

know who is, if we are not. They belong to us in trust, on the *cypres* doctrine which Mr. Sheepskin has been dinning into our ears all these years. They belong to us jointly and severally, in two individual moieties; and, dropping this jargon, I should like to know who is to take them to church, if we do not?"

"That's very like old Justice Earwig's ruling about the man accused of bribery who happened to be a rich man. 'Mr. Snooks must have bribed and found the money,' he declared; 'for if he did not, who did?' Whereupon Snooks was found guilty, fined, and imprisoned."

"Well," said Harry, "let us set off and escort them."

"I don't half like it," said Edward.

"You'll like it much better as soon as you see Edith Price," said Harry.

So Edward Vernon was over-persuaded and went, muttering something which sounded like a creed; and so it was, for it was a never-ending profession of his faith in Alice Carlton.

When they reached No. —, Lupus Street, it was only ten minutes past ten.

"Don't run away, Ned," said Harry; "I sha'n't let you off."

Mrs. Nicholson answered the bell, and replied that Miss Edith was at home. The good woman was smiling again, for her husband had really not come to claim any portion of her week's rent. The clean sweep he had made of "the bank" had satisfied even him for a fortnight.

"Will you be good enough to say to Miss Price," said Harry Fortescue, "that Mr. Fortescue and Mr. Vernon have come to ask to be allowed to go to church with her and Miss Mary?"

"Very good, sir. I'd ask you to step into the parlour, only an old single gentleman lodges in there, and I daren't ask you in without his leave."

"Never mind," said Harry, "we will wait in the hall." It was really only a passage about four feet wide, but he thought it would please Mrs. Nicholson if he called it a hall.

"Oh, Miss Edith!" said Mrs. Nicholson, "here's Mr. Fortescue and Mr. Vernon come to beg to be allowed to go to church with you and Miss Mary."

"I can't go till I have asked my mother," said Edith. "Perhaps she might not like it."

So she went into her mother's room, who had passed a good night, the first for three or four days; for, bad as it was to be dependent on others for money, it was worse to have no money at all. For

her, therefore, on that June morning, Mrs. Price was particularly bright and lively.

“Mother,” said Edith, “Mary and I are going to church.”

“Very well, my dear. God bless you both,” said the invalid.

“Yes, mother; but there is something more. Mr. Fortescue and Mr. Vernon are down-stairs, and they have sent up to ask if they may be allowed to take Mary and me to church.”

“I scarcely know what to say about it,” said Mrs. Price. “It is so hard to have to lie here in bed and decide for others.”

Then, after a few moments' thought, she said—

“Well, well, I suppose you may go. When one is under so many obligations, it does not much matter if one more is incurred. But mind, Edith, that you and Mary come back straight home as soon as the service is over.”

“Of course, mother,” said Mary. “Where else should we go?”

So Edith told Mrs. Nicholson to say that she and her sister would be down in a moment, and in less than no time she came down with Mary; for, as you know, they were ready dressed to go to church.

Dressed, yes ; but not in that array of silks and satins in which some ladies delight to go to church. Edith Price wore a black silk skirt over a dark violet petticoat, and she had a black velvet jacket and a hat, not a bonnet. And she wore the hat for a very good reason—because it shaded her face. Did it become her as well? Yes, it became her exceedingly. But then I have told you that Edith Price, with her clear, dark complexion, her black hair, and great, bright eyes, and exquisite mouth and chin, was so pretty a girl, that you could scarce meet her in the street without turning back to look at her. Of course then you could only see her back ; but her figure behind was so graceful and beautiful, especially in that velvet jacket, that every one felt they were amply repaid for turning round. They did not feel hard and stiff, like Lot's wife just before she was turned into a pillar of salt, but soft and warm, like ginger and spice and all those nice things of which the nursery rhyme says little girls are made of. Then she had very pretty feet, as we think you already know. In fact, she was in every way a lovely, ladylike girl, and on that 5th of June she might have held her own against any lady of the land, however gorgeously arrayed. Mary Price, too, was a pretty little girl, with lighter brown hair

all streaming down her back, in every way suited to be the sister of Edith.

So these two descended the staircase, and stood in the hall, face to face with Harry and Edward.

It was dark in the passage, though outside the sun was blazing, as you may all remember it blazed in June, 1870. Harry Fortescue raised his hat; not so exquisitely, of course, as Count Pantouffles, but still in the most gentlemanlike manner, and Edward Vernon followed his example.

“Good morning, Miss Price,” said Harry. “It is very good of you to let us have the honour of escorting you to church. Mr. Vernon has come with me, because he wishes to renew the friendship which has lately only been kept up by an occasional letter.”

“I am very much obliged to you both, and especially to Mr. Vernon for his kind letter from High Beech, though it came too late to stop my advertisement.”

“Pray don’t mention it,” said Edward; and then, being rather nervous, he gave Harry a nudge, as much as to say, “Why did you bring me into this?”

“We had better lose no time,” said Harry, “but make haste, or we shall be late for church. You


would not mind going to St. Barnabas, Miss Price?"

"Not in the least," said Edith. "The less so as that is the church to which I and Mary usually go."

"I wonder we never saw you," said Harry, opening the door. "And yet, after all, it is not so odd, because at St. Barnabas the men and women are separated, like the sheep and the goats."

By this time they were out in the street, and as the pavement in Lupus Street will hardly admit of four persons walking on it abreast, Edward Vernon had to walk behind with Mary, while Harry Fortescue went on in front with Edith. The pair behind had little conversation. Mary was afraid, and Edward lost in thought as to what Alice Carlton was doing at that moment. Harry and Edith were far more lively. That visit of yesterday seemed to have made them old friends again, and Harry talked so well and feelingly of her father and the happy life he had led at Bourton, and how much he owed to all of them, that Edith was placed at once at her ease.

"It is so kind of you, Mr. Fortescue," said Edith, turning her great eyes on Harry, "to put the case in that way; but we well know how much we owe to you and Mr. Vernon."



“We have only done our duty, Miss Price; and I hope we may always do it. But, after all, doing one’s duty is but unprofitable service.”

“Perhaps,” said Edith, with a strong protest in the “perhaps;” “but how few there are that do it.”

“The more reason for those who feel the duty to discharge it.”

By this time they were on the bridge which leads across the railway from the end of Lupus Street to the Queen’s Road, and the spire of St. Barnabas was in sight. They passed the drinking-fountain on the bridge, and saw a bloated, blear-eyed drunkard cooling the tip of his tongue with a cup of cold water.

“Did you see what was written under the fountain?” said Harry, as they passed.

“No,” said Edith; “I only saw that horrid man, and I was so frightened.”

“The inscription,” said Harry, “was, ‘Let your moderation be known unto all men.’ And a very good text it seemed for the man who was drinking, though not for the fountain. It put me in mind of Mrs. Marjoram—but I forget, you do not know that lady?”

“I know the man,” said Edith, drawing herself

nearer to Harry with a little shudder as she saw him following them.

“Know the man!—how could you know him, Miss Price?” asked Harry in astonishment.

“He is the husband of our poor landlady, Mrs. Nicholson—a very good woman with a very bad husband. He has just stripped her of all her savings.”

“What a wretch!” said Harry, as they turned into the porch of St. Barnabas, with Edward and Mary Price at their heels. Now pray observe, that if Harry Fortescue had been a wicked young man, he would certainly not have taken Edith Price to St. Barnabas. No; he would have taken her to some place of worship where he might have sat next to her, sung out of the same hymn-book, and, in short, been with her the whole service. But at St. Barnabas, as is well known, the fashion of the true frequenters of the place is quite different. A stern verger, like Rhadamanthus, parts the male and female, and assigns them separate seats on either side of the church. So that a man may go to worship there with the wife of his bosom and not know so much as whether she knows a single psalm-tune. It is true that in the side aisles some bold, bad men sit side by side with their wives; but this always causes the verger bitter pangs; he passes by

them with averted eyes and macerated mien, and no doubt does penance for their sins on parched peas and water instead of a hot meat supper that night.

Harry and his party were too early to betake themselves to any such subterfuge, even if they had intended it, and so they had seats pointed out to them in the centre aisle; and there the four sat, Edith and her sister a little in advance, gazing at the painted windows in the sanctuary until the procession passed through the church and service began. They had settled beforehand that they would what they called sit out the service; by which they meant that they would not go out at the pause before the communion, but stay through that and the sermon.

What Edith thought of during those two hours no one can tell. It is only charitable to suppose that she only thought of her prayers. Nothing could be more discreet and decorous than her behaviour; and if she did not make so many bowings and genuflexions as some of the ladies by her, who were continually bobbing up and down, she at least in some way conformed to most of the practices of the congregation. She was a pure and innocent girl, and no doubt she was pleased at the attention shown to her by Harry and Edward

in coming to take her to church. It is a great mistake to imagine that women are insensible to attention; only let it be offered frankly and not clumsily, and they are always ready to accept it from any one who has a claim to offer it. Where no good claim exists, it degenerates into impertinence, and ought to be chastised accordingly. Edith Price, therefore, was both devout and delighted; and it is so rare that both these feelings meet in church, that she thought the whole service charming, and was sorry when it was over.

But we are afraid that neither Edward nor Harry were quite in such a frame of mind. Edward, as we know, was full of Alice Carlton and High Beech, and when an anthem was sung, and he heard it was "Oh, that I had the wings of a dove, for then would I fly away and be at rest," he wished that he, too, were a dove, that he might fly away and be at rest by Alice Carlton's side. This was all so very silly, and so very natural.

Harry Fortescue, we are afraid, was not so full of either Florry Carlton or Amicia Sweetapple as they were of him. Nor was he as devotional as usual; he made his bows and genuflexions in due form, but his eyes rested on Edith Price, who sat on the other side of the aisle a little before him. When

she bent her head forward, he could not help seeing how beautifully her head was set on her neck; not like some of those necks, which we all have seen, which look as though they had heads stuck on them which did not belong to them. When she knelt down, he saw how graceful and supple her figure and waist were, and could not help thinking that a velvet jacket was more becoming than all others. Some one will say that a velvet jacket in June was very out of season—far too warm for any lady to wear. Ah me! but suppose you had only one jacket, and that a velvet one, would you not be bound to wear it? Just like the man in Poggio's stories, who in bitter winter did not find it at all cold in a thin coat because it was his only garment. Besides, have we not all of us known Junes, the June of 1871 for instance, when one shivered and shook, and would have worn a sealskin, or a sealskin waistcoat, if one had not been ashamed. At any rate, there was the velvet jacket, and Harry admired it, both for its own sake and for her that wore it. He went through the service in rather a dreamy state. When they chaunted the Nicene Creed to Gregorian tones, his spirit soared with the music into regions of delight, and when it ceased he sank down again, like a lark whose song is over falls suddenly to

earth. We would rather not say that Harry Fortescue remembered the sermon—no, not 'so much as a word of it; it went in at one ear and out at the other without a trace of its passage. What he seemed to see and hear was Edith Price, and Edith Price alone. Poor Florry! poor Amicia! Shall we add, poor Harry? You all know whither he was going—fast down hill, as many of you think, in love with a girl who was going out as a governess.

“Oh no,” some one will say; “it can't be so bad as that; he has too much self-respect. Of course, he will meet Lady Sweetapple on Tuesday, and Florry at Ascot; they will take care of him. He will either marry the heiress or the wealthy widow. Besides, he's half engaged to them.” Half to two women! We have often heard that said of women by women that they are half, or even more, engaged to two men, but it is never said of men by men. A man to man is either engaged to one woman, and to one alone, or to none. “They will take care of him,” indeed, and so will we; and as he belongs to us entirely, and is our child both by birth and adoption, we will take care that Harry Fortescue does the right thing in the right place. So read this volume through without guessing or anticipation, and you shall see what you shall see.

When the sermon was over, the sheep and the goats rose and left their seats, and then they mingled together at the door of St. Barnabas, and very glad we must say both seemed to meet again. Will it be so at the last great church-going of the sheep and the goats, when the whole congregation of all that have ever dwelt on earth will be called to the Day of Judgment, and none will be able to evade the summons, or excuse himself or herself on the ground of a bad cold, or of a late party on Saturday night?

But to return to our particular sheep and goats; Edith and Mary waited at the south porch, and there in a moment or two Harry and Edward joined them. Harry would have been with them in less than no time, only Edward would stay to stare at the painted glass. "As if you hadn't seen it all a hundred times at least before," said Harry, as he dragged him along.

"Why are you in such a hurry, Harry?" asked Edward. "You used never to be in a hurry."

"We never took any ladies to church before," said Harry; "that's why, if you must know."

"So sorry to keep you waiting, Miss Price," he said; "but I could not get Edward along."

"We have not waited half a minute," said Edith.

“I was not aware that we had waited at all till you said so.”

And so they walked back to Lupus Street, Edward again bringing up the rear with Mary, and Harry walking in front with Edith. And Harry talked to Edith of her plans, and she said she had tried so hard to go out as a governess, and had seen lady superintendents and directresses of homes for governesses, and educational agents, all without effect.

“It seems very hard to get any situation till one has had a situation and established one’s character,” said Edith.

“Why, at that rate,” said Harry warmly, “you can never get one ; for if you can’t get one till you have had one, how in the world can you ever get one at all ?”

“It seems very like it,” said Edith. “And then, I must say, some ladies with large families are not very liberal. I suppose they can’t afford to pay their governesses better. But the last I saw wanted me to take the exclusive care of six little girls, and to teach them English, French, German, Italian, music, and the elements of a good liberal education, for what do you think ?”

“I am sure I can’t tell,” said Harry.

“Why, for nothing except my board and lodging the first year, ten pounds the second, and so on, rising ten pounds a year up to thirty pounds a year, at which sum my salary was to stop.”

“I never heard such an absurd thing in my life,” said Harry. “You had much better stay as you are. You are worth much more than thirty pounds a year to stay at home and nurse your mother, and do nothing. I wonder what this liberal lady had to say in defence of such meanness.”

“She did not consider it at all mean,” said Edith. “All she said was, that she was convinced the right and proper thing in education was payment by results. She was determined to carry out the government system of education in her own family, and not to pay her governess anything till she saw at the end of the year what she could do. She was a great educationist, she said.”

“I should think so,” said Harry, “and at other people’s expense—a way of being great which many people religiously follow. Do you know, I think this plan of going out as a governess all a mistake.”

“Yes,” said Edith; “most of the educational agents said that governesses were a drug in the market. Whether they meant they were as nasty as

physic, I'm sure I can't say, but one told me pretty plainly that I must expect to wait a very long time before I got a situation; and then he added, in a very confidential voice, 'We should expect, if we recommended you, and succeeded in placing you advantageously, a very handsome commission.'"

"Commission!" said Harry; and then he went on, "but, after all, I suppose the man was right. He lives by recommending young ladies for places, and so he must have something for his trouble. Nothing for nothing in this weary world."

"Don't say so, pray, Mr. Fortescue," said Edith; "the world is a very good world after all, and we at least, mother and Mary and I, may truly say that we have found kind friends in it who do everything for us and expect nothing in return."

By this time they had reached No. —, Lupus Street, and Harry Fortescue wished it had been at least as far off as the Temple; as it was, he had only time to say, in a joking way—

"Oh, but you don't know that some of these days we may not expect to receive our talent back with interest. I do not feel as if I had buried mine in the ground."

So with hopes on Harry's part that he might see them soon again, and bows and good-byes from Edward Vernon, the young ladies went into their dingy lodgings, and Harry and Edward walked off to Mrs. Boffin's.





CHAPTER IV.

HOW THEY SPENT THE SUNDAY AT HIGH BEECH.

THE rest of that Sunday was duller than usual for Harry Fortescue. He was quite as dull as Edward Vernon; and as two dulls do not make one bright, they went about looking very much as though they were about to be executed next morning. If Harry Fortescue had only dared, he would have gone back to Lupus Street after luncheon, and taken Edith and her sister to afternoon church—they were so unprotected. When he ventured on some such remark to Edward, Edward only replied—

“They were just as much unprotected before.”

“Yes, but we did not know it,” said Harry.

So, too, Edward Vernon, if he had dared, would have put himself into the train, and gone down to High Beech. If he had only known how welcome he would have been, in spite of E. P., both to Lady Carlton and Alice, he would have gone; but then

he did not know it, and knowing or not knowing whether you will be welcome makes such a difference.

So the two walked in the Park, and dined at the club, and saw all the old fogies settling the affairs of the nation, and talking scandal of their neighbours, quite as spitefully as Mrs. Grimalkin and Mrs. Tabby over a cup of tea. Then they began to yawn, we mean after dinner, and had a smoke in the smoking-room, but somehow or other their cigars were tasteless; and then they resolved to go home and have an early night, and Mrs. Boffin was astonished to find "her gentlemen" back on her return from a Sunday outing which she had taken with a friend to 'Ampstead by the Underground Railway.

Nor was that Sunday very lively at High Beech. All the party appeared in High Beech Church except Count Pantouffles, who declared he should never hear the last of it if his director heard he had attended a place of Protestant worship.

"He has such power over me in the next world," said Count Pantouffles, "that I must not make him too angry in this."

So Count Pantouffles stayed away, good Christian that he was; and if any one chooses they may quote

this speech of his as a proof that there is a future state, in which virtue will be rewarded and vice punished. How he spent his time while the rest were away is not known. Perhaps in reading a French novel, as we have heard he always carried one in his portmanteau; perhaps in playing billiards; perhaps in smoking. But we may be quite sure that, whatever he was doing, it was not such an act of horrible wickedness, in his own eyes, as attending a Protestant service, he being a Roman Catholic.

However, they all got on very well without him, and no one regretted his absence but Mrs. Marjoram, who sighed and said, "Perhaps, if the discourse were a good 'arresting' sermon, the mark of the beast might have been washed off this Papist, and he might have become a lamb of the true fold."


Lord Pennyroyal was as aristocratic and economic as usual. He never wore gloves because they were so expensive—an opinion which we are sure half the young men in the world will re-echo, and only wish they could dare to follow his example. But then they must remember that it is only a very aristocratic person who can fly in the face of the usages of society and escape censure. There is no reason to doubt, if Lord Pennyroyal had been a young man,

he would have set the fashion of not wearing white gloves at a ball ; and if he had been as popular as he was stingy, after that no young man or woman would have worn white gloves ; and more than that, they would have wondered how they could ever have worn them, as if flesh and blood was not much more pleasant to touch than skin torn from the back of a kid. But then, you see, Lord Pennyroyal had never thought of setting the fashion in this respect when he was young, and now he could only protest in vain, for if a man is to make any converts as a prophet in the world of fashion he must begin young ; an old prophet or reformer in that world would be as unsuccessful as the false prophets of Baal when they prayed against Elijah.

But to return to Lord Pennyroyal : he protested against wearing gloves by having only one pair a year, and by wearing them, if it can be called wearing, crumpled up in his left hand. So he appeared in church at High Beech, on the 5th of June, 1870. He wore a very seedy Nichol's paletot, trousers to match, and one of those cheap hats which, as we knew, he was about to barter away on Monday. Taking him as he stood, an old clothes man might have offered him ten shillings for his attire ; even then he must have thrown in his boots to

clench the bargain. And yet Lord Pennyroyal looked every inch a lord. There was that nobility about him which defied alike the degrading effects of stinginess and shabbiness; and just as when you heard him prosing about subsoil drainage and sugar beet, you could not help feeling that there was something grand and noble about him, so even in attire which would only have fetched in Rag Fair the sum we have named, you saw that Lord Pennyroyal was a man and a nobleman for all that. And this, no doubt, was the reason why Lady Pennyroyal, who really was the nicest woman in the world, was so fond of him. She had lived long enough with him to forget his little weaknesses, and to admire his noble nature when anything good was to be done. How different from some people whom we all know, whose eyes become more microscopic the longer they live with others, and end at last by being blind to their many good qualities, and as keen-sighted as lynxes to their shortcomings!

Sir Thomas and Lady Carlton looked what they were as they sat in the Carlton pew—eminently pleasant, genial, trustworthy people. Colonel Barker and his wife stole off to church before the others, as Mrs. Barker said it did not do Colonel Barker good to walk so fast to church, but really



because she wished to have a little of her Jerry all to herself, to use her own words.

“ I have seen so little of you, Jerry dear, since we have been here, I wish we were safe back at home.”

“ The sooner the better for my liking,” was the colonel’s gallant reply.

Soon after them started Mr. and Mrs. Marjoram, or rather Mrs. Marjoram and her husband, much as you might say a shepherd and his dog, or an Italian boy and his marmoset. Mr. Beeswing said he was sure she was going to make him say all the hard bits in the catechism on the way to church, and he certainly looked as rueful as any charity boy on a Sunday morning before he has repeated the collect.

Florry and Alice and Lady Sweetapple went in a little knot by themselves.

“ There go the lilies of the field,” said Mr. Beeswing. “ Shall I come with you as Solomon ? ”

“ We are contented with our own glory,” said Amicia ; “ and at any rate we have wisdom enough to last us till we get to church.”

But it was very little wisdom the three talked. They said little, but that little was all about E. P. ; and Edith’s ears ought to have tingled just about the time of the second lesson in St. Barnabas, for just at that very moment Amicia had said, in reply

to Alice, who declared she had reason to believe that E. P. was a very harmless person—

“It is just these harmless persons who do so much harm in the world, my dear. Who can tell what harm this Edith Price—for we all know that E. P. means a young lady of that name—who can tell what harm this very innocent person may be doing to each of us at this very moment?”

A speech and sentiment so literally true, that Amicia, when the revisers of the Bible have pulled the old text and canon to pieces—which we trust will be a long time first—ought to be added to Deborah as one of the female prophets.

And now they are in church. Mr. Rubrick was nearly as high as the incumbent of St. Barnabas, only he regretted that the ignorance of a rural population would not allow him to make the service as perfect as he could have wished. As it was, it was what Mr. Beeswing called “very near the wind;” as near, we should say, as a cutter can get it, and that is nearer than any other craft. We do not object to it, but Mrs. Marjoram did, and she was a great authority.

“How did you like it?” asked Mr. Beeswing of that rigid lady, as they were walking back from church.

“I call it a performance, and not a service,” said Mrs. Marjoram, as Lady Sweetapple’s singing had been called by that name.

“What is the difference between a performance to be served in church and a service to be performed, as the Rubric says, in the same place?”

“I am sure I don’t know,” said Mrs. Marjoram. “You had better ask Mr. Rubrick.”

“How did you like the sermon?” asked the indefatigable Beeswing

Now we cannot help saying that this was a very delicate question to ask, for, if you must know, the subject of Mr. Rubrick’s discourse had been the ineffable beauty of perpetual celibacy, and Mr. Beeswing’s question showed the courage of an early martyr in exposing himself to the lion. Perhaps it would be more appropriate to liken Mr. Beeswing to Don’t Care, in the story-book, who, as is well known, met with the same fate as the blessed Polycarp, St. Ignatius, Irenæus, Clement, and a host of early martyrs.

“Think of it?” said Mrs. Marjoram; “I thought it disgusting. And before old married women with grown-up families, and young women who expect to be married, I say it was disgusting. I wonder Mr. Rubrick had the face to read out those banns.”

"Do you believe in the millennium?" asked the Socratic Beeswing.

"I do," said Mrs. Marjoram, like a charity girl.

"Then you ought rather to rejoice in sermons on perpetual celibacy, because if there were no marrying or giving in marriage, say from this very day, we should have this millennium in which you so firmly believe in about a hundred years."

"These are subjects which I do not care to jest about," said Mrs. Marjoram. "I think Mr. Rubrick's sermon downright disgusting, and I believe firmly in the millennium. You mayn't be able to reconcile my opinions, but after all that is only what we find in all matters of faith."

Amicia and the young ladies went back as they came, discussing E. P., and trying, in the case of the Carltons, to get Lady Sweetapple to remove the prohibition about mentioning Edith Price to any human being.

"We really ought to tell mamma," said Alice, whose mind was much easier after Edward's reassuring expressions.

"I shall tell her," said Florry. "Girls ought to keep nothing concealed from their mother."

"You really must not," said Amicia—"not, at

least, till Tuesday. I have a reason for wishing my secret to be kept till then."

"Well, then, on Tuesday morning early," said Florry.

"On Tuesday morning you may tell what I told you," said Amicia; and as she said this she thought she had been very clever, for on Tuesday she should have seen Harry Fortescue, and reckoned fully on having him at her feet. You see she had faith in herself, this very clever descendant of the great house of Smith.

We have nothing more to tell of that Sunday at High Beech, except that it was quiet, calm, and pleasant. As different from that smoky London Sunday as heaven is from earth. They all went to church again in the afternoon, and heard another sermon, this time from the curate, on the Immaculate Conception. It was not quite the same in doctrine as the decree of the Roman Council on the same article of faith, but it was very like it—as like as two twins, or two apples, or two peas, or whatever else is not the same, and yet so like no one could tell the difference. If all this is a mystery to any one, let him go to High Beech, and confess—his doubts to Mr. Rubrick or his curate. They, no doubt, one or both of them, will explain the matter fully. Then

they walked by the river, and saw the kingfishers feeding their young, as if it were not Sunday, and the big fish eating the little ones without remorse. They saw all animals and all nature breaking the Sabbath, and felt that they were men, and Christian men and women, whose natural instincts were restrained by respect for the holy day.

“That’s the same kingfisher, I am sure,” said Florry, “that Mr. Fortescue talked about.” And then she felt so happy at seeing something in which he had taken interest.

Amicia said nothing, but she felt almost as sure of Harry Fortescue as the kingfisher of striking a fish every time it made its dart, and she laughed at heart.

From the river the whole party—for they were all out, the Marjorams as well—slowly climbed the hill towards the house, and there, under the very tree where Florry had drawn out that confession from Amicia about her father, they found Mr. Sonderling sprawling on the ground.

“Have you been to church, Mr. Sonderling?” said Lady Carlton when the first salutations were over.

“No, indeed,” said Mr. Sonderling. “I have to church too often in my youth been. I am very ill of it.”

He meant "sick," but every one understood what he meant.

"A little more church-going might make you better," said Lord Pennyroyal compassionately.

"I shall never more to church go," said the German sadly.

"Why not?" said Lady Pennyroyal.

"Because I cannot bear him," said Mr. Sonderling.

"Him!" said Lady Carlton. "Not Mr. Rubrick? He is such a very nice man."

"I mean his church, and not him," said Mr. Sonderling. "When I was young I was a Christian, but now I am enlightened I know better."

"Quite awful," said Mrs. Marjoram, looking on Mr. Sonderling as if he were a rattlesnake or *pieuvre* at least.

"I do not think me so awful as you," said Mr. Sonderling. "None of your state-religion will I bear. It is to a wise man a disgrace."

"Don't you believe in anything, Mr. Sonderling?" said Lady Carlton.

"Oh, madam, I believe in too much," said the German. "I see God everywhere, but you English so often only see him in church once or twice on Sunday."

"Shocking pantheist!" exclaimed Mrs. Marjoram; "quite as bad as any of the heathen philosophers!"

"What do you do all Sunday?" said Lord Pennyroyal, bringing the discussion back to a practical shape.

"I smoke, my lord," said Mr. Sonderling, "and I reflect."

"I think," said Count Pantouffles, with a spark of wit, "if I were not a Catholic I should be a pantheist."

No doubt it was his love of tobacco and not of thought which led him to utter this opinion.

"And on what do you reflect?" asked Lord Pennyroyal pursuing the inquiry. "Is it on politics or business, or on the harvest or the price of gold?"

"*Ach nein!*" said the German; "I care for none of those things. You cannot properly on them reflect. These things are quite beneath the dignity of man."

"The deuce they are," said Colonel Barker.

"Reflection," said Mr. Sonderling, growing eloquent, "is not concerned with politics or trade. How could I, when I was a tobacco fabricant, reflect on tobacco or a tobacco-pipe? Such things are beneath reflection. So also are your Church and your State and your politics, and all your cast-iron English life. Here in England is, properly speaking,

no science, no thought, no reflection—no, and No Religion! You are all very good, worthy people, you buy and sell, you speak in Parliament, but in all these there is no thought or reflection; and so it comes to this, that probably I, Carl Sonderling, lying under this tree and reflecting on God and things divine and necessary for man's intellect to know, am doing Heaven more service in my generation than twenty thousand clergymen of all sects praying at the same time in as many pulpits. They debase, but I lie here and strive to elevate, the natural dignity of man."

"What a frightful heathen!" said Mrs. Marjoram.

"It is a modest creed, and yet pleasant if one considers it," said Mr. Beeswing, quoting the "Sensitive Plant." "See too what he saves in Church Establishment. There he lies under the canopy of heaven and beneath an ancient tree. He carries his church with him as a snail bears its shell on his back, and he can never be disestablished like the Irish Church, because his church is identical with himself."

"What's the good of a church with only one follower?" said Lady Carlton.

"Mahomet had only one follower for ever so

long," said Mr. Beeswing, "and he rose to be a religion."

"I wish to make no converts," said Mr. Sonderling, "but I reflect."

"Do you believe in nothing, Mr. Sonderling," said Amicia, "really in nothing?"

"I believed once in you," said Mr. Sonderling sadly; "and now I reflect."

"Remember your promise," said Amicia sternly, "and don't talk nonsense."

"*Ach!*" said Mr. Sonderling, as he thought of those wedding-clothes and of his delusion only two nights old.

"Will you come to dinner just as you are?" said Lady Carlton.

Yes, he would come to dinner, and he came; but he was very dull, and so were all the rest of the company. Harry and Edward had taken away with them all the life of the party.

So they sat yawning, and when they had yawned enough they all went to bed, and that was how the Sunday at High Beech came to end.

"There ought to be a mission to convert the Germans," said Mrs. Marjoram to her husband, as that worthy was thinking of nothing but getting off to sleep as quickly as he could.

“Mr. Marjoram,” cried his wife, “why do you lie snoring when I speak to you?”

“I heard you say something, but I thought it was good-night,” said Mr. Marjoram.

“What folly!” said Mrs. Marjoram; “what I said was there ought to be a mission to convert the Germans.”

“With all my heart, my dear,” said Mr. Marjoram, giving a great snore as his contribution to the cause, and rapidly losing all consciousness in a sound sleep.





CHAPTER V.

LADY SWEETAPPLE SEES LADY CHARITY AND HEARS
SOMETHING OF EDITH PRICE.

NEXT morning they were all up with the lark, for were they not all going away? We pass over the departure—how Lord Pennyroyal looked noble, and Lady Pennyroyal like an angel; how Count Pantouffles bowed and bowed; how Mr. Beeswing was genial to the last; how glad Colonel and Mrs. Barker were to get back to town; how Mrs. Marjoram had neglected her duties too long; and, though last not least, how delighted Amicia was that the visit was over, and that she should get back to Lowndes Street and see Harry Fortescue.

The absurd thing was that Florry and Alice were quite sorry to part with her, for as long as she stayed was she not a link between them and their lovers, and when she was gone might she not come between them and the objects of their affection?

“I am so glad she is going,” said Florry to Alice, “and yet after all she can do me less harm here than I know she will in town.”

“Don’t fret, darling,” said Alice, “she will never win Harry Fortescue.”

“Oh,” said Florry, “you say that because you feel so safe with Edward.”

“That’s because I trust him,” said Alice. “Why can’t you trust Harry in the same way?”

“Ah, if I only could,” said Florry, and then she sighed and sobbed.

“Now do cheer up,” said Alice; “you know we shall meet them both at Ascot next week.”

“How do I know that?” said Florry; “and how do you know it?”

“I heard mamma settle it all with Lady Pennyroyal. We are to go there this day week for Ascot Races. Won’t that be nice?”

“Yes, if my enemy does not get possession of Harry in the meantime,” said Florry sulkily.

So they saw them all off in the break and barouche and brougham, and two carts carried off a mountain of luggage, and then High Beech relapsed into its usual condition, and Mr. Podager had a rest from his labours.

“Such toil,” he said to Mr. Beeswing’s valet as

he gave him a glass of port before he went away, "is fit to make an old servant give warning."

Amicia reached town before luncheon; and as soon as ever she got to town she sent a message to old Lady Charity, in Eaton Place, to say that she wanted to see her particularly that afternoon, and would call on her between five and six.

Old Lady Charity was a very remarkable woman. She was called old because no one knew how old she was; but, to look at, she might have been as old as Mrs. Methuselah, and older. Her face was all a web of wrinkles like the rind of a melon, her teeth were too faultless to be real, and her eyes were the only features which remained as they had been when she was young. They were preternaturally bright and fine, and though some people compared them to the eyes of a toad, many a woman fifty years younger might have been glad to have such jewels in her head. Lady Charity was not very tall, but she was very limp—she was like a bundle of clothes supported on two mop-sticks, and but for her eyes she would have been nothing. But you could see by them that she was a woman of energy, and yet they were so soft it was plain that she had the kindest heart. Young people of either sex used to mock at her, and say, "Charity covered a multitude of sins;" but

that was all spite. She had passed through her trials and experiences, and had made up her mind that the world was not so bad as it seemed. The result was, that she was always ready to help those who could not help themselves, out of pure kindness. It cannot be said she had much knowledge of right or wrong, and as for principles, she declared she could never understand them.

“I try to do no wrong myself,” she used to say, “but I well know how hard it is not to do wrong; and so I really think I sympathise more with sinners than with the virtuous. At any rate, they deserve our pity more.”

And so it was, that while other people were breaking the sinners' heads with their precious balms, or heaping coals of fire on their heads, Lady Charity was ever ready pouring in oil and wine, and playing the Good Samaritan. No wonder all who were in trouble and affliction respected and adored her, while ladies like Mrs. Marjoram declared openly that she was only holding a candle to a certain personage who shall be nameless.

“If there were no Lady Charities,” said Mrs. Marjoram, “there would be fewer wicked people in the world.” But then we all know Mrs. Marjoram was one of those people who would have sat side by

side by Saul, keeping the clothes of those who were stoning Stephen. It was no wonder, therefore, if she threw stones at Lady Charity, and called her a go-between, and a mischief-maker, and a busy-body, and a time-server, and we know not what besides. On the whole, therefore, it is as well for Lady Charity, and for all the Lady Charities, that the rest of the world of women are not like Mrs. Marjoram.

“Now,” said Amicia, when she had heard that Lady Charity would be very glad to see her between five and six—“now I feel as if I had the ball at my foot. But, first of all, I must find out something about this Edith Price. I think I had better send Crump to find out.”

So Crump was duly summoned, and warned to be cautious, and after she had “her” dinner, “which it was that she had waited too long for,” she was to go to No. —, Lupus Street, and try and find out something about Miss Price.

“You must not mention my name, you know, Crump,” said Lady Sweetapple. “I only send you because I take an interest in the young person.”

“Of course, my lady,” said Mrs. Crump—“of course I shall say nothing about you. Shall I try to see the young person, my lady?”

“Yes, by all means, Crump, if you can; and if you see her, you might ask her if she would like a situation in the country, because you think you know a lady who could find her one.”

“Yes, my lady,” said Mrs. Crump; “I understand it all now.” And down she went to “her” dinner.

“If I could only get her out of town,” said Amicia, “and take Harry with me to Ascot, I should breathe more freely. But I do hope Crump will be discreet, and not compromise me in the matter.”

After luncheon Lady Sweetapple ordered her carriage and drove out. We really cannot say how many shops she went to, except that she went to ever so many which she had visited just before she left town. Of course she went to Marshall and Snellgrove’s, and Mrs. Brown’s, and Mde. Devy’s; where else she went we cannot afford time to tell. But she spent two hours in these flights from shop to shop, and then she went to Lady Charity’s in Eaton Place.

“Oh, dear Lady Charity, I am so glad to see you!” said Amicia, running up and embracing the bundle of rags.

“So, my dear, am I to see you,” said Lady

Charity. "And how have you enjoyed the country? I see by your looks that you have been very happy."

"Not so happy as I wished," said Amicia sadly. "Several things happened that put me out very much."

"And what were they, my dear?" said Lady Charity, handing her a cup of tea.

"It is a very long story," said Amicia. "But what should you say if I told you that I met at High Beech my first love?"

"First love!" said Lady Charity; "why, I should say it was not so pleasant as meeting one's last love."

"Yea," said Amicia pettishly. "But suppose I told you I met there both my first and my last love?"

"That depends if you were off with your first love," said Lady Charity.

"Of course I was off with him," said Amicia. "It was years ago, you know. But still it was not pleasant."

"Of course not," said Lady Charity, sipping her tea. "Did anything happen?"

"Oh, dear, no," said Lady Sweetapple. "No one knew that I met my first love except myself and the first love himself. I stopped his mouth very cleverly."

“I always knew that you were very clever,” said Lady Charity. “But how did you stop his mouth?”

“By leading him on, and making him believe I might still be a little in love with him, and that he might love me just a little.”

“Rather a dangerous game to carry on under the eyes of the last love. How did he take it?”

“Oh, very well indeed,” said Amicia. “But, dear Lady Charity, can I confide in you? This last love has a love of his own, and I want to find out all about her.”

“Is Harry Fortescue in love with Florry Carlton?” asked Lady Charity. “A little bird told me he was as good as engaged to her.”

“Then a little bird told a great story,” said Amicia. “It’s all a mixing up of the two sisters. Edward Vernon is as good as engaged to Alice Carlton, but I am as sure as I sit here that Harry Fortescue is not engaged to Florence Carlton, though of course she would be very glad if he were.”

“Who, then, is Harry Fortescue’s love of whom you are so afraid?” said Lady Charity, her eyes glistening with desire to worm out this secret.

“Oh, nobody—only a young person, not a lady,”

said Amicia ; “in fact, I hardly know what she is, but her name is Edith Price, and she lives in Lupus Street.”

“That’s a very odd street for a lady to live in,” said Lady Charity.


“Just what I said,” said Amicia. “She can’t be a lady ; but, for all that, Harry Fortescue writes to her, and she answers him by advertisement in the *Times*.”

“Let me hear all about it,” said Lady Charity, pouring out another cup of tea, which Amicia refused, and Lady Charity drank.

So Amicia told her the whole story ; and when it was over, Lady Charity said—

“It sounds very strange, and I cannot tell what to make of it. But don’t fret about it. Young men will be young men. And when we get Mr. Fortescue down to Ascot, I daresay all will go right.”

“There again is another vexation,” said Amicia. “No sooner had I arranged with Mr. Fortescue to come to stay with you at Ascot, than that stupid Lady Pennyroyal went and asked the Carlton girls to come and stay with her ; and as Edward Vernon is devoted to Alice, and Harry Fortescue to Edward, he declares he will not come to us at Ascot unless



Edward is asked too, and so I have come to beg you to include him in the invitation."

"Pray don't say anything about such a trifle," said Lady Charity. "Give my compliments to Mr. Vernon, and say, that as he and Mr. Fortescue are such bosom friends, I cannot bear to part them, and so I hope he will come to Ascot as well."

"You are an angel," said Amicia, giving the wrinkled old face a kiss.

"Rather an old one," said Lady Charity, "and most of the feathers have fallen out of my wings; but, for all that, I am still helpful and warm at heart."

"Of course you are, dear Lady Charity," said Amicia; "we all know that." And so she sailed away down-stairs and drove home, and waited to hear what Mrs. Crump had to tell her.

She had not to wait long, for as soon as that worthy Abigail had finished "her" tea, she went up-stairs to tell her mistress how her mission had ended.

"Well, Crump," said Amicia, "did you find Lupus Street?"

"Yes, my lady, which it is a very low-lived place," said Mrs. Crump.

"And did you find No. —?"

“Yes, my lady; and I see the landlady, which is a hard-working, industrious woman, as was once a lady’s-maid.”

“Indeed, Crump; and what turned her into a lodging-house keeper?”

“Marriage, my lady,” said Mrs. Crump; “and a very bad marriage too, which it was with a drunken butler out of place, who drinks and robs her of her little ald.”

Pray observe the “ald,” for it was Mrs. Crump’s way of pronouncing “all.”

“And did you learn all this from the lodging-house keeper herself?” asked Amicia.

“Lord bless us, my lady!” said Mrs. Crump. “Do you think a wife would go and tell another woman outright at first sight as how she had got a drunken, good-for-nothing husband? Wives as has been lady’s-maids ain’t so bad as that. They never speak no harm of their husbands to strangers.”

“How do you know, Crump? You have never been married,” said Amicia.

“No, but I have been as good as married, my lady,” said Mrs. Crump; “which it was near I was being married before I came to you to two drunken butlers, much the same as Mr. Podager, which drunk up my savings before marriage, and all the while I would never have spoken an ill word

against them — no, not if they had broken my 'cart."

"You have been very unfortunate, Crump," said Lady Sweetapple.

"Yes, I have, my lady," said Mrs. Crump with great dignity. "Servants has their feelings as well as mistresses, and there's many a 'eavy 'cart as stands behind a fine lady dressing her back 'air. But let me tell you of No. —, Lupus Street."

"I am most willing to hear," said Lady Sweetapple; "only I don't care so much to hear about the landlady as about the lodger. I want to know all about Miss Edith Price. Did you hear anything about her?"

"Oh yes, my lady," said Mrs. Crump. "I 'eard all about her from the greengrocer at the corner as serves the Prices."

"The Prices!" cried Lady Sweetapple in amazement. "Why, how many Prices are there, I should like to know?"

"Three, my lady, in family," said Mrs. Crump; "which it consists of an old bedridden mother and two daughters—Miss Edith, as is grown up, and Miss Mary, a girl of twelve or so."

"This is worse than I thought it," said Amicia, speaking half to herself. "They seem quite respectable."

“Yes, my lady, indeed they are. That’s what Mr. Leek the greengrocer says. A very civil, respectable man, who can’t help seeing what goes on in his opposite neighbour’s house. He said it was a sight to see how lovely Miss Edith looked when she went to church yesterday morning with Mr. Fortescue at her side, and Mr. Vernon walking after them with Miss Mary.”

“Walking to church with Miss Edith only yesterday!” cried Amicia. “This is worse and worse! How deceitful!”

“Quite what I was thinking, my lady; and I said to myself as how deceit was not confined to butlers or under-butlers, but is found in higher places, where it didn’t ought to be. Fancy a handsome young man like Mr. Fortescue leaving the best ladies in the land to run up to town and go to church with a young person from Lupus Street! It’s quite shocking!”

“That will do, Crump,” said Amicia faintly; “I have heard quite enough. Thank you very much for your trouble. When I want you, I will ring.”

So Mrs. Crump withdrew. And as soon as she had left the room Amicia threw herself upon her bed—for this scene was in her bedroom—in an agony of despair.



CHAPTER VI.

HARRY FORTESCUE CALLS ON EDITH PRICE.

NOW, if Mrs. Crump had only waited five minutes longer at the greengrocer's at the corner, in Lupus Street, she would have seen something worth seeing. No less a person than Harry Fortescue walked up to No. —, as cool as a cucumber, and quite as fresh and pleasant as cucumbers are in the month of June. What brought him there? We are sorry to say that Harry Fortescue had lain awake all that night tossing and turning, very much as Florry Carlton and Amicia Sweetapple had tossed and turned for his sake. That scarlet fever which so often attacks young men and women was overcoming him. Harry Fortescue was falling in love with Edith Price. Of course he did not know he was falling in love. Love, like death, often gives no warning. Oftener still, love pretends to be something else, the arrant dissembler that he is! That is so like him. He disguises himself like some

other disease, puts on a mask, wears false hair, hangs out sham colours, and then, when you come close to him, just to look at him, he pounces on you, and you are his prisoner for life. So it was with Harry Fortescue. According to his own statement, it was something that he had eaten; the night had been so hot; or he had caught cold sleeping with his window open; anything rather than the real cause of his complaint. But all the while he pitied Edith Price. It was a pity such a pretty girl should go out as a governess; it was a pity she should walk out alone; in fact, she was an object of pity from whatever point of view she presented herself to his mind's eye, and we all know how near pity is akin to love. How really bad he was, how far gone, how dangerous the symptoms, may be inferred from the fact that he shunned the society of Edward Vernon, and declared after breakfast that he must go down to chambers and "work."

"Work!" said Edward; "when was it that we last worked?"

"I am sure I don't know," said Harry; "but I mean to begin."

"I am afraid it's too late," said Edward. "My working days at least, I hope, are over."

"And mine are just beginning," said Harry.

“But work or play, old fellow, just you stay here while I go down to Pump Court and look after my letters. If there are any for you there I’ll bring them back, and, if I don’t see you in the meanwhile, remember we dine at the club at eight.”

“All right,” said Edward, who was not sorry to be alone, that he might think of Alice Carlton. He had passed the first season of doubt and distress, and was in that sweet second dreamy state when one is best pleased, if one’s love is absent, to sit down and do nothing but build castles in the air in which to dwell for ever with her, and her alone.

So Edward sat there for hours, sometimes smoking, but always thinking of Alice Carlton, and making up his mind, only to unmake it that he might remake it, that Alice Carlton was the most charming woman in the whole world.

If only one had watched Harry Fortescue closely, he might have been thought a madman. Sometimes he almost ran, sometimes he walked as slowly as a cat; sometimes he talked to himself, and sometimes he smiled and laughed. This was all the disease coming on. He was very red at heart. Somehow or other he made his way to the Pimlico pier, and got on board the boat. If he had only known that this *Bluebell* or *Daisy* was the very boat

in which Edith Price had embarked on her voyage of discovery three days before, it would have become as divine a ship to him as *Argo*. But he knew nothing about it, and so it was only a *Bluebell* or a *Daisy*, and the captain no Jason, but John Johnson, who hailed from Wapping when he was not navigating his craft, which was very seldom.

At last he reached Pump Court, and there he saw the same old laundress crawling down, pitcher in hand, whom Edith had seen on the same spot.

There was this difference, however, that Harry knew the laundress and the laundress Harry, and so she stopped instead of crawling on, and made him something like a curtsey on the landing.

"Anything happened," said Harry, "since we have been away? Where's Bowker?"

Bowker, you must know, was the name of their joint clerk, who used to amuse his leisure by taking in law papers to copy for the law stationers, and improved his mind in the evenings by attending the Discussion Forum and Coger's Hall. He was a copying clerk by day and a great democratic orator by night, and according to the belief of his friends, and we may add in his own opinion, the real reason why no Tory ministry could stand was because Mr.

Bowker denounced that faction in two set speeches every week.

"When Bowker's on his legs them wretched Holigarchs shake in their shoes," said Mr. Serjeant Buzwing's clerk.

"Mr. Bowker," said the laundress, "is just gone hout to get his dinner. He'll be back in half an hour," she said, rather sardonically, pointing to the paper which still hung out at the letter-slit, telling the same story as had deceived poor Edith Price.

"It's rather early for dinner," said Harry. "It's only half-past eleven."

"Mr. Bowker always haves his dinner early," said the laundress. "He say it's good for the voice."

"Well, open the door," said Harry. "It's lucky I met you, for I have forgotten my key at home." Then, as the old bundle of rags—just as much a bundle as Lady Charity, only Lady Charity's bundle was clean, while that of the laundress was very dirty—opened the door, Harry went on, "Has any one been here since I was away?"

"Let me see," said the bundle. "There's a no one been. Oh, yes; there was one young woman as came last Friday as ever was, and wanted me to open the door, that she might find out your haddress."

“And of course you let her in?” said Harry eagerly.

“Of course I did nothing of the sort,” said the bundle. “I knows my duty better. The Honourable Society would a soon ’ave bundled me out, if so be I let any young women into the chambers which belong to me. No, Mr. Fortescue, I did not let her in, but I told her she might get your haddress at the club, or at your lodgings, and so she walked off. She seemed very tired, and a’most fainting for food.”

“Did you offer her any?”

“Oh, dear, no,” said the bundle. “I had had my dinner when she came, and it was too soon for tea. Besides, I know my place too well to give tea to strange persons.”

“And where was Bowker?”

“Mr. Bowker had gone out, like as it might be now, to get his dinner. He’s wery regular in his habits, is Mr. Bowker. He had gone out, and the paper said as it says now, ‘Return in half an hour.’”

“I believe he’s always out,” said Harry, “and always returning in half an hour, like his masters,” as he went in and shut the door on the bundle.

Of course Harry found no letters worth taking

away. There were no briefs, no bills even, a circular or two, and a threatening notice from the Bench that unless he and Edward Vernon paid up their arrears their names would be screened in hall, or something dreadful of the kind. For the rest, there was nothing but dust in the chambers, and altogether the aspect of the rooms was anything but cheerful.

"I don't think there's so much as a blackbeetle in the place," said Harry. "It will be a splendid place for work though, and when I begin to work Bowker won't be able to go out so often, imitating his masters, and telling attorneys to return with their briefs in half an hour. How sorry I am that Edith should have come all this way for nothing. I wonder if she will ever come here again."

So he set off home; but before he went he called the bundle, whom he heard rolling about in the chambers overhead, pretending to tidy them, and begged her to "tell Bowker that he had been, and that it was very likely that he should be at chambers very soon again."

"Wery good, sir," said the bundle. But as soon as his back was turned she chuckled, and said, "I don't think Mr. Bowker will like to hear that. It will interfere with his copying, at which he earns better nor thirty bob a-week, and if it stops his

speaking at night I am certain sure Mr. Bowker will resign."

When Harry Fortescue had done what he wanted at chambers, though it was not much after all, as you see, he went back to the club, and thought he would have luncheon; but when he got there he found he could not eat. The spring soup was cold, and he declared to the waiter that the cooking was disgraceful. Don't believe him; the soup was as good as the soups at that club always are. It was only his taste that was at fault—only another symptom of the dire disease.

After this pretence at luncheon, he wondered what in this world he should do before dinner. Should he go to the Exhibition? No, he had seen it already, and it was such a crush. Sit on a chair in the Park? No, he could not do that alone. He must have Edward with him—and how to find Edward? Now you all know he could have found him very well if he chose, but Harry Fortescue did not choose. He was only proposing one plan after another that he might reject it, and at last do what was lying like Hope at the bottom of that true Pandora's box, the human heart. It is strange, but it is no less true, that the only companion Love ever cares to consort with is Hope, and this is why Hope and

Love so often lie together in the innermost recesses of the heart. Mr. Sonderling perhaps would have told you that what lay deepest in the breast of man was reflection; but then we are, fortunately, not all Sonderlings or Germans, and with us Hope and Love go for far more than reflection. At any rate, that is our view of the case, and in this view we are sure we have many sympathisers.

What Harry Fortescue really wanted was to see Edith Price, and his mind was set on doing this, and not on any luncheon, Exhibition, or chair in the Park, with or without Edward Vernon.

But he was some time in making up his mind; and, in fact, he sat almost as long thinking over Edith Price as Edward over Alice Carlton at Mrs. Boffin's.

"Did you ever hear of such geese?" says some heartless young person; which young person is quite welcome to utter the same insulting remark till she feels herself in the same position, and then if any one calls her a goose she will not like it.

At last—it must have been about four o'clock—Harry Fortescue rose quickly, put on his hat, and was soon striding along Pall Mall towards Lupus Street. His mind was made up. He was going to see Edith Price; and you may take

our word for it that he did not look at all like a goose.

You know if he had only been five minutes sooner he would have been seen by Mrs. Crump and the greengrocer. As it was, only the latter saw him as he was serving out greens to a customer, and so he said nothing except to himself, and what he said was very short and very much to the purpose—
“There he is again.”

We cannot say that Harry Fortescue was not afraid when he knocked at the door. He was not yet in that condition of perfect love which banishes fear.

“Is Miss Price at home?” he asked, in a faltering voice, of Mrs. Nicholson. “I know it’s no use asking to see Mrs. Price, she’s such an invalid.”

“I am sure I don’t know, sir,” said Mrs. Nicholson, “but I’ll ask;” and away she ran up-stairs to tell Edith that Mr. Fortescue was at the door and wanted to see her.

“Mamma is asleep,” said Edith, “and I can’t wake her up to ask her. But I should like to see him. Pray tell him if he will return in half an hour I may be able to see him.”

When Harry Fortescue heard that Miss Price begged him to return in half an hour, he thought

at first that she was mocking him by returning him that lying label on the door of his chambers; but, whatever he thought, he saw that if he returned in half an hour he might have a chance of seeing Edith, whereas if he did not he should certainly not see her at all. Like a wise lover, therefore, he said at once he would return in half an hour, and walked off to spend that interval of time as he best might.

As Mrs. Boffin's was so close, it would have been most natural to go home and tell Edward what he had been doing, but somehow he did not feel as though he should like to tell Edward of his purposed visit to Edith Price. This was only another symptom. In the morning he had not been conscious; in the afternoon he was conscious and ashamed. The age of innocence was over in that affection. He felt like our first parents in Eden after the fall. Harry Fortescue had indeed fallen like them, but not into sin, only into love. Dear me! what a trouble this love is in this weary world!

He would not go home therefore. He pattered about Cambridge Street and Churston Street, and all the unknown streets in that neighbourhood—streets so little known to the fashionable world that only once or twice in the year does an announce-

ment of a birth or a marriage get into the newspapers from any of them ; and then it is only a short notice, as of a runaway couple from the country, who have found their Gretna Green on Thames Bank, thus : " At St. Gabriel's, Sloperton Street, Mary Moggs to John Perkins, both of Manchester. No cards." As if there were likely to be any, any more than that such a couple could be assisted into the fugitive state of matrimony by more than one clergyman. Very few births are advertised there. They register their children, and don't christen them. But people die in Sloperton Street, as they must die everywhere, and so there are more advertisements of death. All last year there were two from Sloperton Street in the *Times* ; one was a retired solicitor, and the other a stockbroker whose business had retired from him. He closed his account, went to live in Sloperton Street, and died of a broken heart.

All round this neighbourhood did Harry Fortescue walk fiercely. Little boys looked at him, and whispered to one another that he was " the Pimlico stag " come out to try his wind. At last he emerged on Thames Bank, near the mouth of the Grosvenor Canal, and looked at the steamers and the Suspension Bridge, but it was only for a moment or two.

“Dear me! I sha’n’t be back in time if I don’t make haste.”

And back he went to Lupus Street, to the admiration of the little boys, who all thought he was taking his second lap.

“He’s backed hisself to do a thousand miles in a thousand hours, and this is his first hour; that’s why he’s spurting so.”

But Harry never heeded them, and when he reached No. —, Lupus Street, it still wanted ten minutes before the half-hour would be up.

“This watch of mine has taken to going slow,” said Harry; but it was only his own heart that had just taken to going fast. You all know, of course, that the heart is God’s clock; that He regulates it, and makes it go fast or slow; that when He says, “Stop,” it stops, and we stop too. We cannot be too careful either of our hearts or our watches.

Off went Harry again, this time all down Lupus Street under the eyes of the greengrocer, who knew that he was not doing a match against time. He watched him till the bend in Lupus Street took him out of his vision; for there is a bend and line of beauty in Lupus Street just as much as there is in the Venus de Medicis. When he lost sight of him,

the greengrocer shook his head and retired to his small coals and summer cabbages.

“I’ll bet a penny I know what that young gentleman is after.” But as there was no one to bet with, and it is dull work betting against one’s self, Mr. Leek did not bet his penny.

At last Harry Fortescue reappeared, tearing down Lupus Street on the same side of the street as the greengrocer’s shop; and when he got opposite to Edith’s house, he rushed across through the mud made by the water-carts, who made all the mud in London in the summer of 1870, and knocked at the door. Even then it wanted one minute to the half-hour, but he felt unless he knocked that very minute as if something would happen to him.

“Can Miss Price see me now?” he asked.

“Yes, sir; she has asked her mamma, and Mrs. Price don’t object. You will find Miss Edith and Miss Mary in the back drawing-room.”

Now when Mrs. Price awoke, and she did soon after Harry Fortescue left the door, Edith went into her room and said—

“Mr. Fortescue has been here, mother, and asked to see me. I sent him away then, but I told him if he came in half an hour I would ask if you objected to my seeing him.”

"I don't object, Edith, if you do not," said Mrs. Price, kissing her daughter's broad brow. "You are mistress of the house now, you know."

"I wonder what he wants," said Edith.

"What was it that he talked about yesterday? I know you told me, but my head is weak, and I have forgotten."

"About nothing but my going out as a governess, and I told him how heartbreaking it was to try so hard, and still to be of no use to you and Mary."

"I think you may see him," said Mrs. Price. "Perhaps he has heard of a situation for you from some of his grand friends. He used to be a nice, well-behaved young man. Is he the same now?"

"He seemed just the same yesterday," said Edith. "More of a man—more earnest—but still the same frank Harry Fortescue of whom poor papa was so fond."

"I think you might see Mr. Fortescue, Edith," said Mrs. Price. "Mary will, of course, be with you."

"Of course, mother," said Edith.

In a few minutes she left her mother, and ran for Mrs. Nicholson, and said she should be happy to see Mr. Fortescue.



CHAPTER VII.

DEEPER AND DEEPER.

WHEN Harry Fortescue was going up those creaking stairs, so different from the slippery black oak staircase at High Beech, he could not help feeling like a fool. Was he not a young man of self-possession? He was. But when a man is in love he is not self-possessed, but love-possessed, and that is a very different matter. The little god is so jealous, he will bear no rival near his throne. He turns out all the feelings that existed before, and reigns supreme. Self-possession must yield before him like anything else. When, therefore, Harry Fortescue came into the presence of Edith Price he was tongue-tied, and scarcely knew what to say. He had accomplished his purpose and won his way to her, and now he faltered, as when a soldier who has scaled a fortress is smitten by a chance shot on the rampart he has won, and sinks and dies in the very moment of triumph.

“I called to see you, Miss Price——” and then he faltered and stopped.

“It is very good of you,” said Edith, quite cool and self-possessed, and expecting him to say something, as she supposed he had something to say. Pray observe that she was as firm as she was free. Like a strong woman she guarded her own house. Love had not yet entered into possession and served her common sense with a notice to quit.

“I thought——” said Harry Fortescue, and then he stopped again.

Now what answer was Edith to make to this? What answer can a young lady make to a young man who has “thought”? It was too like Mr. Sonderling’s “reflection”—it was ridiculous. But Edith had no wish to laugh at him, so she said nothing.

“I thought,” said Harry Fortescue, recovering himself just a little—“I thought I might be of some use to you.”

This at least was a connected and coherent sentence. It was not all interjection and ejaculation—as Love’s language generally is, for he feels so fast that his tongue fails him, and he babbles—and so Edith could answer it.

“You have been of great use to us already, Mr. Fortescue. We owe everything to you.”

“I hope to be of still more use to you,” said Harry. “The little I may have done was not half enough. I feel all the while as if I had been an unprofitable servant.”

That was a very long sentence for a man falling hopelessly into love; quite an oration, Cupid would have called it—Cupid, who loves short sentences and sighs and sobs; who lives on the indeclinable parts of speech, and would never use a verb or a substantive, or even an adjective, if he could help it.

But this long sentence was not thrown away. When both sides are not in love, they cannot exist on interjections. A German, whether in love or not, may go from one end of the world to the other, and never use any other expression than *Ja wohl!* or, *Ja so!* and he would eke it out with a pipe; but fortunately we are not all smokers or all Germans, and so unless two people are in love in England they must use intelligible sentences. Now Edith Price was not in love, and so she answered Harry Fortescue's sentence by another, expressing a wish, and the wish that just then was next her heart.

“I do so wish I could get a situation as a

governess. I thought perhaps you had come to say that you had heard of one that would suit me."

"I came to say nothing of the kind," said Harry abruptly. "I do not think such a position at all worthy of you."

That was just the first tiny step—Baby Love's first footfall. It was so gentle that Edith Price did not at all recognise it.

"If the position is not worthy of me, I will make myself worthy of the position," she said proudly. "Anything is better, Mr. Fortescue, than obligation."

She said this so sternly as well as so proudly, that Harry Fortescue was quite frightened, for he thought that Edith Price was going to pay off all her obligations to him and have nothing more to say to him.

"I don't admit that there has been any obligation," he said at last; "but what I beg, and what Mr. Vernon begs, is that you will do nothing rashly, and not accept a position which may be irksome to you, because you fancy that you are our debtor, when it is we that feel ourselves in debt to you."

"So this is what he came to say," said Edith to herself. "He came to beg me not to hurry. How good of him!"

But what she said at last was—

“It is very kind of you and Mr. Vernon to be so considerate. We all of us can never be sufficiently grateful to you for what you have done.”

By this time the conversation, such as it was, began to flag, and to threaten to degenerate into vain repetitions, as odious in conversation as in prayer. Harry Fortescue felt he had been there quite long enough, and yet he scarce knew how to beat a retreat. But here Love, who had before thwarted him, befriended him by suggesting, “You had better say something which will give you an excuse for calling again very soon.”

Then Harry quite brightened up, as every one does at Love’s prompting, and rose to depart; but before he went he shot Love’s arrow, and it went home.

“It is possible,” he said, “as you seem so anxious about getting a situation, that I may hear of one to suit you; and, if you will allow me, I will call again and tell you how I have succeeded.”

“Oh, Mr. Fortescue,” said Edith, “I should be so much obliged if you would. The sooner I can do something for myself the better.” And as she said this her face was lighted up with a glow of independence and self-reliance, which made her lovely face twice as lovely.

So Harry took his leave, better pleased altogether with his visit than he had dared to hope. At any rate he had leave to call again soon. But all the while he said to himself—

“She shall never go out as a governess, if I can help it. She looked more like a queen than a drudge when she shook hands with me.”

And so he went home to Mrs. Boffin’s to dress for dinner. Strange to say, he found Edward sitting in the same position as when he left him, smoking and staring before him.

“Well, old man,” said Harry, who was in good spirits now, “what have you been doing?”

“Nothing,” said Edward. “I haven’t even been out.”

“Idle dog!” said Harry. “I have done ever so much. First, I went to chambers and saw our laundress. That lazy fellow Bowker was out as usual. I begin to think he’s almost as lazy as you. But I heard the whole story of Edith Price’s visit, and I am afraid she was not very well received by the old woman. Then I had luncheon at the club.” He did not say with how little appetite.

“What more?” said Edward listlessly.

“And then,” said Harry, hurrying on as if he were telling something of very little consequence,

"I went to Lupus Street, and paid a visit to the Prices."

"To the Prices!" said Edward. "Why, you only saw them yesterday."

"I know," said Harry; "but I thought I might help the poor girl as to getting a situation, and so went to talk about it."

At this Edward Vernon said nothing, but he thought a great deal and smoked vigorously. After a while he said, "We had better go and dress, or we shall be late for the opera."

So they dressed, and went to the club in a Hansom, and dined, and after dinner they went to the opera, and there they saw Lady Sweetapple in a box on the grand tier; and she bowed to them, and seemed as though she wanted them to come up to her, but Edward was afraid to go without Harry, and Harry would not go.

"We have seen a good deal of her at High Beech," he said, as though it were an excuse for not seeing any more of her just now.

"I quite agree with you," said Edward, who was all on Florry's side, and who would not have gone to Ascot except for the sake of seeing Alice.

"We shall have enough of her next week at Ascot," said Harry. "Do you know, Edward, I am

almost sorry I ever accepted Lady Charity's invitation."

"There's no good regretting it now," said Edward; "repentance comes too late. Go we must to Ascot under Lady Charity's wing, and you must not forget that you have to go to-morrow to Lady Sweetapple, to see if Lady Charity has invited me."

"I sha'n't forget," said Harry. "And now, do you know, I find it so dull here, I shall go off home to bed."

"I'm quite ready to go with you," said Edward, who thought he could think just as well about Alice in bed as at the opera, which was just what Harry thought of himself and Edith Price. So the two again astonished Mrs. Boffin by their early hours, and, what had never occurred in their lodging-house life before, they were both in bed before twelve o'clock.

"They must be both in love," said Mrs. Boffin. "They'll be looking after their tea and sugar next," as she helped herself liberally out of the tea-caddy and sugar-basin, with the excuse, as she did so, that "tea and sugar did so spoil and turn musty and sour if it were not used soon."

In spite of going to bed early, Harry Fortescue scarcely slept a wink. He awoke quite wan

and haggard, and no delicacy which Mrs. Boffin placed before him seemed to tempt him in the least. He was getting very far on in his disease.

As for Edward, his appetite was much as usual. His love only told on his heart and manner, not on his health, and so he seemed robust compared with Harry.

“You are looking ill, old fellow,” he said. “Town doesn’t agree with you after the country. You don’t eat a morsel, and I daresay you don’t sleep well.”

“I don’t, indeed,” said Harry.

“Well, cheer up,” said Edward with great stupidity—“it will soon be all right. We shall meet the Carltons very soon at Ascot, and then we shall be as happy as the day is long.”

“You will, I daresay,” said Harry; “but I don’t feel as if I should be at all happy at Ascot.”

“You’re the strangest fellow in the world,” said Edward. “Why, we’re all going because you were going, and now you say you feel as if you shouldn’t be at all happy at Ascot.”

“I say what I feel,” said Harry.

“If you go on in that way,” said Edward, “I shall have to take you to Gull. I tell you what it is, your liver is out of order.”

“We shall see,” said Harry, lighting his pipe. “But let me alone a little now, that I may ‘reflect,’ like Mr. Sonderling.”

“With all my heart,” said Edward; “for then I can think on Alice.”

So the two sat and smoked, and all the while that silly Edward thought Harry was full of Florry Carlton. He thought his dislike at going to Ascot was only because he did not care to go there with Amicia, and he was glad for Florry’s sake.

“I sha’n’t go down to chambers to-day,” said Harry, after he had been silent at least half an hour. “I said I would go down and begin to work; but, on second thoughts, I shall put off work until this horrid Ascot visit is over.”

“I am all for putting off work,” said Edward. “I am sure I don’t care if I don’t do a stroke of work for fifty years.”

“More shame for you,” said Harry. “I really do mean to begin to work, only I don’t exactly know how to set about it. I do wish my father had been a fat attorney.”

“Of course you can’t take to work all at once,” said Edward, puffing out a philosophical cloud of smoke. “Recollect the Latin proverb, ‘*Nemo repente fuit turpissimus*,’ which some one profanely

rendered, 'It takes seven years to make an attorney.'

"Whether it is *turpe* or not to become a working barrister, I mean to try it," said Harry, "and that very soon."

"I shall believe it when I see it," said Edward. "But don't you think it's time you went to see Lady Sweetapple?"

"Any time will do before luncheon," said Harry.

"If you drive it off too long," said Edward, "she'll fancy you are coming to be asked to stay to luncheon."

"Very true," said Harry. "What is the time now? Half-past twelve! I had no notion it was so late. I must get to Lowndes Street as soon as I can."

"I hope you will be in better spirits when you come back," said Edward. "I never knew you so dull."

So Harry Fortescue dressed himself, and before one o'clock was standing on the step of No. —, Lowndes Street.



CHAPTER VIII.

HARRY FORTESCUE CALLS ON LADY SWEETAPPLE.

NOW if we were to say that Amicia had not been expecting him, we should tell a dreadful story. Every one who lives in that part of the world knows how the door-bell goes in the height of the season; what with invitations and letters, and bills and circulars, the tinkling never ceases.

As Amicia thought that every ring must be Harry's, and that he would come early, because she wanted him to come early, you may imagine how often she had been disappointed. Once it was a card for Mrs. Grimalkin's "At Home."

"I sha'n't go to that," she said; "it's in Ascot week, and in Ascot week I shall be otherwise engaged."

Then came another ring. "That must be Mr. Fortescue;" but it was only the Dairy Reform Company, of which it may be said, that they leave no

efforts untried to convince the world that theirs is the only pure milk both for infants and adults. As soon as she saw it, Amicia tore it up in a rage and threw it, without reading it, into her wastebasket.

“I hate milk,” said Amicia. “I really do think it’s the very nastiest thing in the whole world.”

Then came another. “Now he really is coming,” she said, and gave a look at her lovely face in the glass. “Yes, I shall do,” she said, as she turned to the door, expecting to see his handsome face. But it was only another circular. This time it was the Great Western Railway, which took time by the forelock, in announcing that excursion trains would run in August to all the places on their line at fares of fabulous lowness.

“What insolence in these companies!” said Amicia. “As if they could not leave one to choose for one’s self! And then, the Great Western to send this to me, who have property in the west! If I lived there, all my pleasure would be spoiled by these excursion trains.”

That circular too she tore into little bits, and away it followed the pure milk into the wastebasket.

"I won't expect him any more," said Amicia. "I have a great mind not to see him at all. It is too provoking to wait and wait, and never to see him."

So she sat down and tried to read, but the more she read the more she thought of Harry Fortescue, and how he dared to take Edith Price out to church on Sunday.

At last the right ring came, as we know, about one o'clock, when Amicia had been waiting two hours—and two hours is a long time to wait for a lady who is very much in love with a young gentleman.

She heard his footstep on the stair, and knew it as if by instinct.

"Now he's really coming," she said; "and I must forgive him if he behaves well."

"Oh, Mr. Fortescue, I am so glad to see you again! How have you been? Are you quite well?"

She said this because she could not help seeing that he looked wan and pale, and out of spirits, and her quick eye put it down at once to Edith Price.

"I do not feel very well," said Harry, "but it is nothing. Edward Vernon says it is only the change to London smoke after the pure air of High Beech."

“It was your own fault. Why did you go?” said Amicia, returning to the old grievance.

“I thought I had explained,” said Harry, “to my own satisfaction, if not to that of any one else, that I only went because I could not help going.”

“Yes, I know,” said Amicia bitterly. “It was all about E. P. and that advertisement. Every one knows now who E. P. is. I knew it long ago. I told you her name was Price, and now every one knows that E. P. is Edith Price.”

“And what does it signify to any one if her name *is* Edith Price?” said Harry.

“Oh! nothing, of course,” said Amicia. “I know nothing about her, thank heaven. I only know that her name is Edith Price; and, as her own advertisement confessed, she lives in Lupus Street—a very respectable locality no doubt, but one in which, I must say, no one ever heard of a lady living before. Then about the cheque——”

“I desire, Lady Sweetapple,” said Harry, “that you will say nothing about the cheque. It should be sufficient for you and all my friends to know that Miss Price is a lady in every sense of the word. I can give no further explanations, and I expect to be believed.”

Amicia was a very clever woman, as you all know

by this time. She saw she had pushed her inquiries about Edith Price to the very verge of a quarrel, and she wisely desisted. "I am so glad to hear she is a lady," was all she added, and then she went on—"I am so glad you have come, because it is all settled about Mr. Vernon's visit to Ascot. Lady Charity says she will be delighted to see him at Heath House."

"I have no doubt Edward will be delighted to come," said Harry, as if he did not care very much for the visit so far as he himself was concerned.

"And do you not like to come, Mr. Fortescue?" said Amicia in a tremulous voice.

"I thought I should like it very much when you asked me," was Harry's guarded answer.

"But do you not care to come now?" said Amicia, feeling very much as if her fish were escaping out of her net after all.

By this time Harry, who was really one of the best-natured men in the world, and also one of the best bred, began to see that he would be behaving in a very churlish way if he did not say something civil to Lady Sweetapple, after all the trouble she had taken to get Edward asked to Ascot.

"Of course I care about it. I daresay we shall

be very happy at Ascot, if the weather is only fine."

That was thoroughly English to bring in the weather as a cause of happiness; and, though Amicia had spent her youth among the deafs and dumbs, she could not help answering—

"What does the weather signify? I can always be happy"—then she added, "with those I like. I carry my own weather about with me."

"Then I hope you will carry a large stock of fine weather with you," said Harry; "or, if I may order it for you, let it rain every night to lay the dust, and let there be bright sunshine every day, that we may enjoy the races."

"I wish I could command the weather as you command me," said Amicia; "I would take care to please you in everything."

As she said this, Amicia did not blush, but Harry blushed, and felt his face grow red and hot. He clutched his hat, and evidently meditated a retreat; but Amicia was not going to part with him yet.

"You mustn't go yet, Mr. Fortescue," she said; "I have so much to tell you;" and then, instead of telling him anything, she came and sat nearer to him, and asked him how he had liked the opera the night before.

“So little,” said Harry, “that I went away at the end of the first act. I never enjoyed any music so little.”

“That was because you did not come up to me,” said Amicia. “I did not care a bit for the music; but we might have had some rational conversation.”

What Lady Sweetapple meant by rational conversation Harry did not exactly understand, but he thought he must say something.

“I am sure I don’t know why we did not go up to your box, except that we both felt so tired that we went home to bed.”

“When I saw you leave the stalls,” said Amicia, “I made sure you were coming up to the grand tier, and I said so to my friend, Lady Gadabout—you know Lady Gadabout, of course?—but you never came; and so—and so,” she said, “I too went back to bed, not so much tired as disappointed.”

“I should be so sorry to cause you any disappointment,” said Harry, who felt his face cool again.

“Then be a good boy and do as I tell you,” said Amicia. Then she went on, “Do you never think of marrying, Mr. Fortescue?”

Harry’s face began to glow again, and he felt his heart beating, much in the same way as it begins

to palpitate at the beginning of a dreary sermon, and you know there will be thirty minutes more of it, and that there are five people between you and the door of the pew, over all whose feet you will have to trample to get out. If any one says his heart never palpitated in a pew in his life, all we can say is that ours often has. In the same way Harry Fortescue felt that he was about to hear something possibly not to his advantage, and yet he could not jump up and run away. After a little pause, he answered—

“I have thought of it a great deal, and always come to the same conclusion.”

“And pray what is that?” said Amicia eagerly.

“That it is no use thinking of marriage if one has not money to support a wife.”

“A very poor excuse,” said Amicia. “Other people have money if you have not.”

“Of course, I know that,” said Harry, not choosing to take what she said as she meant it—“of course, I know that. There is Lord Pennyroyal, for instance; he has plenty of money, and he is married. That only proves what I say. He has money, and is married; I have only a competence, and am not.”

“You will not understand,” said Amicia almost

violently. "I meant there were women that had money."

"Florry Carlton, for instance," said Harry; "but I know little of Florry Carlton."

"I don't mean Florry Carlton," said Amicia; "I don't like Florry Carlton. If I had my way, I should never marry her to you. Other women have money besides Florry Carlton."

"I don't think I shall ever marry a woman with money," said Harry. "It's against my principles. I could not bear to live on my wife's money."

"That's being rather hard on all the heiresses and women who have money," said Amicia. "Would you condemn them all to that perpetual celibacy which I heard exalted by Mr. Rubrick last Sunday, because you are too proud to marry a woman with money. Consider what the result would be. The world would come to an end."

"Then, at least," said Harry, "our dear friend Mrs. Marjoram would have her way, and we should have the millennium."

"I don't want the millennium," said Amicia. "I suspect it is only another term for a community of wives or husbands. If I ever married again I should expect to have my husband all to myself, and if he were young and good-looking I should be

very jealous of him ;” and as she said this she gave Harry a look of love which it was impossible to mistake—for you must all remember that Amicia was very fond of him, and very much piqued at his coldness.

Harry Fortescue now felt that he must effect a diversion, and try to escape. He thought he could best do this by carrying the war into the enemy’s quarters ; so he said, looking hard at Amicia—

“ And have you never thought of marrying again, Lady Sweetapple ?”

“ How can you ask such a silly question ?” said Amicia. “ I should have thought you knew better. I am very well as I am. Why should I marry again ?”

This cunning answer nearly threw Harry off his balance.

“ Oh,” he said, “ you spoke just now of what you would do if you married again, and so I fancied you had thought about it.”

“ Very ridiculous,” said Amicia ; “ and just like a man. They always fancy women, and widows especially, are perpetually thinking of marriage. Now it is quite time enough for a single woman to think of marriage when some one proposes to her seriously. If you want to know my intentions,”

she went on in a half-joking way, "you had better propose to me, and then you shall have a proper answer; but pray do not do anything of the kind unless you are really in earnest."

After this very clever speech, in which Amicia showed her own mind without compromising herself, Harry Fortescue felt that if he did not mean to propose he had better depart. And so he again seized his hat and took leave.

"You will come and see me again," said Amicia, "before the week is out; and by that time I hope you will have abandoned your pride and your principles together, and made up your mind if you meet a woman that you like not to let her money stand in your, or rather in her, way."

By the time she had ended, Harry was on the stairs, but he heard it all; and what he said to himself when he got into the street was, "I hardly know how I got out of that, but I feel as if I had had an escape of making a fool of myself."





CHAPTER IX.

HARRY FORTESCUE AND LADY SWEETAPPLE MAKE UP
THEIR MINDS TO GET EDITH A SITUATION.

ABOUT the same moment Florry and Alice were making a clean breast of it to their mother, and telling her all they knew about Edith Price. It was very little, as you all know. It only came to this: that Lady Sweetapple said that Harry Fortescue was in love, as the young ladies put it, with one Edith Price, who was the E. P. of Harry Fortescue's advertisement, and that Edward Vernon had written a letter addressed to Edith Price, No. — Lupus Street, thus identifying her with E. P., Lupus Street.

When they had told all they knew to their mother, Lady Carlton only laughed at them, for their story had been told with many groans and confessions; and the only thing that was plain in the whole matter was, that Florry was just as much in love with Harry as Alice was with Edward.

“The mere fact of Edward Vernon’s writing to Edith Price,” said Lady Carlton, “proves to me that neither of them are in love with this mysterious Edith Price. You may depend on this; and so now I hope your minds will be easy. I am certain you have, neither of you, a dangerous rival in E. P.”

“But what I want to know is,” said Florry, “how Lady Sweetapple became acquainted with the secret.”

“I am sure I cannot tell,” said Lady Carlton. “Probably she heard it quite by accident. But if you will take my advice, you will, both of you, think nothing more of Edith Price, but make up your minds to be as happy as you can at Ascot.”

“I think I shall be quite happy at Ascot,” said Alice. “But I do so much wish to know whether Lady Charity has asked Mr. Vernon to the races.”

“And I,” said Florry, “should be so happy, if it were not that Lady Sweetapple, whom I look upon as the origin of all evil, were not going to be there.”

“In this very contrary world, my dears,” said Lady Carlton, “people had better make up their minds only to be as happy as is possible, and even then you will find it is possible to be very happy.”

“Ah, but I want to be entirely happy,” said Florry; “I hate half-happiness. Sooner than not have the whole, I should prefer to be miserable.”

“Don’t be so silly, Florry,” said her mother; and so that conversation came to an end.

As soon as Harry Fortescue got back to Mrs. Boffin’s, he made Edward Vernon happy by telling him that Lady Charity had asked him to the races, and then he astonished him by saying that he had a great mind not to go to the races at all.

“In fact, old fellow, if it were not for you, I wouldn’t go down at all.”

“What has Lady Sweetapple said to you?” asked Edward.

“Nothing worth speaking of,” said Harry. “But I may tell you I should not go to Ascot for her sake.”

“Then you’ll go for Florry Carlton’s sake,” said Edward.

“I am not so sure of that,” said Harry; and then he bounced out of the room and ran up to his bedroom and threw himself on his bed.

In this position Mrs. Boffin espied him through a crack in the door, and she went down to Edward and told him she was sure Mr. Fortescue must be

“hill,” as he was lying on his bed. “A thing I never seed one of my gentlemen ever do before.”

“I don’t think he’s ill,” said Edward, “only a little out of sorts. He’ll be better presently.”

And then Edward Vernon sat in his arm-chair, thinking of Alice, and counting the days to Ascot; while Harry Fortescue lay on his bed and sulked, thinking of Edith Price.

And was Edith Price thinking of Harry Fortescue at all? That is a more difficult question to answer, as the minds of young women at that age are very dark. They are not nearly so transparent in their love affairs as young men. Still, we may venture to say that if Edith Price had not the slightest notion in the world that Harry Fortescue was fast falling in love with her, there could be no doubt that she felt flattered by his attention and the evident interest he took in her and her affairs. Once or twice, therefore, after that interview on the Monday, she caught herself saying—

“How kind it was of Mr. Fortescue to come and take Mary and me to church, and how much more than kind to come and show such interest in getting me a situation! I wonder whether he will come again, and tell me that he has heard of one to suit me?”

Nor was it all a pretence on Harry's part, that offer of seeking for a situation for Edith. He was quite determined to seek, but just as resolved, if he could help it, that she should never accept.

"A girl like that," he said, "is not fitted to go out as a governess; she ought to do better. She will be quite thrown away teaching little boys and girls. But, as I have promised, I must try to perform; and this very afternoon I'll set off and see Mrs. Grimalkin about it."

Before he had those angry words with Lady Sweetapple about Edith Price, he had half made up his mind to ask her advice on the subject, but the hostility she had shown and her passion against Edith warned him off; though, if he had not been very blind, as men always are when in love, he might have known that Amicia would have given her little finger to get rid of a rival by packing her off as a governess into the country.

Now, however, he had lost all hope in that direction, and so his only refuge lay in Mrs. Grimalkin.

"I sha'n't trouble that lazy fellow, Edward, with this," said Harry, as he stole down the creaking stairs. "He doesn't care half so much for Edith as I do; he cares for nothing but Alice."

And so when Edward awoke from his reveries,

and asked Mrs. Boffin how Mr. Fortescue was, she told him—

“La, Mr. Vernon! Mr. Fortescue has been out this hour. I saw him walking down the street as fast as he could lay legs to the ground.”

“He might have told me he was going out,” said Edward to himself, who, for the first time in his life, felt as if he had a right to be jealous. “I don’t know what it is,” he went on: “I feel as if there was a cloud rising between me and Harry, and yet I am sure it can’t be Florry——”

However, this soon passed off; and when, an hour later, he went to the club and saw Harry sitting at luncheon, he went up to him and said—

“Why, Harry, Mrs. Boffin came and told me you were ‘hill,’ in her very choicest English; and then the next thing I heard of you was, that you were alive and walking, like Mother Hubbard’s dog.”

“I went out on a little business,” said Harry; “and, having done it, you see I am here at the club, and ready to do whatever you wish.”

“I wish you would tell me what your business was,” said Edward.

“That is soon told,” said Harry, with his usual frankness. “I went out to see if I could get a situation for Edith Price.”

“Edith Price again!” thought Edward; and then he said out loud, “And did you hear of one likely to suit her?”

“I heard of several,” said Harry; “but none that would be worthy of her acceptance.”

Here Edward was nearly saying, “Beggars must not be choosers,” but he restrained himself, and went on—

“But she said she would be content with almost any situation.”

“So she did, no doubt; but that only makes it a duty for her friends to see that she does not throw herself away.”

“And whither did you go?” asked Edward.

“Oh, to Mrs. Grimalkin,” said Harry. “You know she subscribes to all the governesses’ homes, and knows all the lady-superintendents in London. But when she read out her list it came to this, that Edith would get on the average about twenty pounds a year, and have to find her own clothes out of that.”

“Not very magnificent,” said Edward. “How many twenty pounds a year do we pay for cigars?”

“I am sure I can’t tell,” said Harry. “But do you know, Edward, I don’t think I shall smoke much longer.”

“Not smoke!” said Edward. “Why, what’s the world coming to, Harry Fortescue? Not smoke! I can never believe it.”

“You will believe it when you see it, like all the rest of the world,” said Harry. “Of course I sha’n’t leave it off all at once. By degrees I shall drop my cigars, first one, then two, three, and so on, a day. Then, you will see, it will come quite easy.”

“But why should you leave off smoking?” said Edward—“it’s awfully jolly.”

“From motives of economy,” said Harry, with dignity.

“I declare, Harry, I think you must have been bitten by Lord Pennyroyal. I never heard a fellow talk such nonsense in my life. Motives of economy! the very worst motives for a man with a competence.”

“Perhaps I may want to do better things with my money,” said Harry.

“Oh, I see!” said Edward. “You are going to invest it, like Lord Pennyroyal. I shouldn’t be at all surprised if you went into partnership with him in a sugar-beet factory.”

“Don’t you laugh at me, Ned,” said Harry sadly. “I am speaking quite seriously about economy.”

“I am very sorry to hurt your feelings, Harry ;

but I really couldn't help chaffing you a little. Why should a young man like you, who pays his way, want to hoard up his money and cut off his cigars?"

"I have told you already," said Harry—"I might make better use of it."

"It won't be, I hope, till after Ascot," said Edward; "or, better still, put it off till the season is over, and then no one will detect you in the ungentlemanlike operation of cheeseparing."

"You may laugh," said Harry, "but I mean to save my money for all that."

As he said this, he turned away into a room in the club where no one is allowed to speak loud, and so their conversation was cut short. He pretended to be going to write a letter, but it was nothing of the sort, it was only to escape from the society of the best friend he had in the world. Now see what a separatist Love is, when he steps between the oldest friends and parts them, even when they are not both in love with the same woman! Talk of the exclusiveness of the Whigs! Love must have been the first old Whig, he is so fond of choosing his own company, and that company is almost always himself.

"I'm sure I can't tell what has come over him,"

said Edward Vernon, as he looked at Harry through the glass door in the club. "I wonder what it was that Lady Sweetapple said to him. He used to tell me everything that happened to him in the old times."

From which you see that the silly fellow was still running his head against Amicia, and refusing to see the real rival to Florry Carlton which had sprung up in Edith Price. As for the "old times" he talked of, they were as old as yesterday. It was only since that morning that he and Harry had any secrets from one another.

As for Amicia, it cannot be said that she was very happy. For once in her life she was completely puzzled. She could not tell whether Edith Price or Florry Carlton was most to be dreaded. When she heard from Mrs. Crump, on the authority of the greengrocer, that Edith Price was so respectable that she lived in lodgings with a bedridden mother, and even went to church, she was quite shocked. It was a great blow to her to find that Edith Price was not what she called a low-lived person; but when Mrs. Crump declared that Mr. Leek called her a real lady, she was in downright despair. In this state she had gone to the opera, when her mortification was great to find that Harry

left the house without coming near her. When she waited for him and he never came, she grew more desperate ; and at last, when they were on the verge of a quarrel, it was only her fear of losing him altogether that induced her to restrain her feelings.

But when he was gone her despair returned. She now cared nothing for Florry Carlton ; Edith Price was her real rival, and how she was to be got rid of was the next question. We know there are many writers who would not scruple to let their creations betake themselves to the nearest chemist's shop disguised in a black beard and false nose, and then, having obtained prussic acid on pretence of poisoning a dog, to put it into half-a-dozen of dry champagne, and send it in as a present to the Prices from an admiring wine-merchant. Or they would have watched her to a refreshment-room, and when she was in the act of eating a Bath bun they would have sprinkled arsenic over it ; and so, in one way or another, have got her out of the way. But we are not as such writers of fiction ; we prefer to dispose of our victims, if we have any, by natural means ; and this is how we mean Amicia, if she can, to despatch Edith Price—not into another world, but into the country. She thought if she

could only get both her rivals out of the way, she could easily manage Harry Fortescue. As she sat and thought, it occurred to her that Mrs. Crump had been very clever in finding out so much yesterday from the greengrocer, and that she might as well send her out on the like mission again. The bell was rung, and in due time Mrs. Crump appeared, rather red in the face; for was it not the sweltering June of 1870, and had she not just had "her" dinner—and a very hearty dinner too—off a shoulder of mutton and onion sauce?

"Crump," said Lady Sweetapple, "I don't think I shall wear that violet velvet jacket again. It does not fit me, and it can't be altered. I will give it to you."

"Oh, so many thanks, my lady!" said Mrs. Crump; and she was just about to run up-stairs and take possession of the coveted piece of attire, which she thought would just suit her complexion.

"And, Crump," said Amicia, "there is something else I want to say. You know Lupus Street?"

"Of course, my lady," said Mrs. Crump, rather aghast; "which it was the same street I was in yesterday."

"Very true," said Amicia; "and to that street I want you to go to-day. You had better see your

friend the greengrocer again, and find out all you can about the Price family."

"Very well, my lady," said Mrs. Crump. And away she went, first to secure her jacket, and then she put on her things, and made herself tidy, as she called it, and then she sallied out to Lupus Street, which, after all, is not such a very long way from Lowndes Street.

All the while she was away Amicia sat and waited, for she could think of nothing but her rival; and it was a curious thing that there sat Harry Fortescue at the club, and Amicia in Lowndes Street, both thinking of Edith Price. If they had only known that they were thinking of the same person, what a comfort it would have been to them!

It was two hours before Mrs. Crump came back; but then she was open-mouthed.

"Oh, my lady, I have found out all about them. Mrs. Price is a poor widow, and she has two daughters, Miss Edith and Miss Mary, as I think I told you yesterday; and they have nothing to live on; and it is said what they have comes from Mr. Fortescue—that is to say, from the gentleman as took them to church, and that's Mr. Fortescue. And Mr. Leek—that's the greengrocer, my lady—

says that I was hardly gone yesterday, when he seed Mr. Fortescue walking up the street like a mad thing, and he went up to No. —, and gave a knock as made the street-door shake again; and when it was opened he said something and went away, but he walked up and down the street for half an hour, and then he went back and went in and stayed there ever so long. All this is as true as Gospel, and Mr. Leek is ready to swear it.”

“We are not detectives, Crump, or the police. We don’t want Mr. Leek to swear, we only want him to tell the truth.”

“He do tell the truth, if I’m a judge of truth, my lady,” said Mrs. Crump.

“Perhaps he only saw the bedridden mother,” said Amicia, half aloud, wishing to give herself and Harry every chance.

“As if Mr. Fortescue were a man to go and see a bedridden mother, my lady!” said Mrs. Crump indignantly. “My name is not Crump, if he did not go to see Miss Edith.”

“Go on, Crump,” said Amicia. “Did you find out anything more about the family?”

“Yes, my lady. Mr. Leek do say that Mrs. Nicholson—that’s the landlady, my lady—told him that as the family were very poor, Miss Edith were

trying to go out as a governess, but, try all she could, she could not get a situation."

"Indeed!" said Amicia, with a bright smile on her lips. "So Miss Edith wants to go out as a governess. If she did not object to go into the country, one might assist her in getting a situation. It would only be an act of charity to help the poor family."

"It would, my lady," said Mrs. Crump. "And as to objecting to go into the country, it's only servants as make that objection. Governesses are always ready to go where they can get places."

"Very true," said Amicia. "It is so hard to get good servants, and there really is such a glut of governesses."

"No doubt of it," said Mrs. Crump. "Miss Price would be glad enough to go into the country."

"That will do, Crump," said Amicia. "You have done what I desired very cleverly, and you may have my shot velvet skirt as well as the jacket. I sha'n't wear it again."

"Oh, thank you, my lady," said Mrs. Crump, as she vanished, thinking, as she went, that she would not object to go even into the country, if her visits were so well rewarded.

"Now, I see a means of escape," said Amicia,

passionately, as soon as Mrs. Crump was gone. "It will be no hard matter to get a situation for this girl, and to banish her to some distant part of the country—South Wales or Cornwall, or even Scotland or Ireland. She must be separated from Harry Fortescue. Going to church on Sunday with a pretty governess is very bad for young men. For my part, I wonder how Mrs. Price could have permitted it. Why, I, an old married woman and a widow, scarce dare to walk to church alone with a young man—how much worse, therefore, must it be for a young girl? No! they must be separated as soon as possible, and then all will go right. As for Florry Carlton, I defy her; she will only appear in the field at Ascot to be beaten."

Then she thought a little while and said—


"Yes, I have it. First I will go to Mrs. Grimalkin—she always has a list of friends who want governesses; and if I can't hear of a situation from her, I will throw myself back on dear Lady Charity's kindness; she knows every one, and will be sure to have friends in the country who want a governess. But it must be in the country."

With these words she rang the bell, ordered her carriage, and in half an hour was on her way to Clarges Street, in which the Honourable Mrs. Grimalkin lived.



CHAPTER X.

AMICIA GOES TO MRS. GRIMALKIN, AND FAILS.

ADY SWEETAPPLE knew Mrs. Grimalkin too well to tell her the whole truth. It is well known that there are grown-up people in the world to whom you can no more tell the whole truth than you can give a new-born babe a beef-steak ; it is too much for them ; they cannot assimilate it all themselves ; they have to share it with others ; in a word, they gossip about it, and great harm arises.

“ Mrs. Grimalkin is not like dear Lady Charity,” thought Amicia—“ one can’t altogether confide in her ; but then she has many friends, and, in short, knows much more about governesses.”

The Honourable Mrs. Grimalkin is, as you all of course know, the spinster sister of Lord Tabbicat. They are a very, very old family—older in fact than the Pennyroyals. They were here before the Conquest ; and, though no Burke or Dod of those

days has come down to us, it is as sure as anything can be sure that there were Grimalkins in Britain in the time of the Romans. Mrs. Grimalkin was pretty well off for an old maid of quality, and she lived in a little poky house in Clarges Street. Why she lived there nobody quite knew. Some said it was because Clarges Street is so narrow that you can always see what your opposite neighbour is doing. Men don't so much appreciate this advantage, but to old ladies who seldom stir out this privilege of always keeping your eyes on the family over the way is invaluable. Others said Mrs. Grimalkin lived there because the house had belonged to her mother, Lady Tabbicat, who had left it her by will. If this be so, there can be no doubt that Mrs. Grimalkin had two good reasons for living in Clarges Street—the gratification of a laudable curiosity as regards her neighbours, and her mother's bequest. We hope, therefore, that no one will ever ask again why Mrs. Grimalkin lives in Clarges Street.

When Amicia arrived she found Mrs. Grimalkin in her boudoir, as she called it—a little back drawing-room, pokier even than the front drawing-room. The house, of course, was divided against itself, and had the staircase in the middle. You say you don't

know Mrs. Grimalkin, and would be glad to know what she is like. We beg pardon—we thought every one knew Mrs. Grimalkin ; but if you must know, this is what she is like. She is a little old woman with a brown face and very bright eyes—eyes as bright as diamonds, and a skin as brown as a berry. Why she looks so sunburnt is hard to say ; perhaps she gets so burnt in her two months at Hastings in the summer that she can't get the tan off all through the year. If it were fair to compare a lady of such old family to an animal, one would say Mrs. Grimalkin was like a toad—she was as brown as a toad, and as fat as a toad, and as slow as a toad in her walk, and her eyes were as bright as a toad's. Some uncharitable people carried on the comparison, and said she was as spiteful as a toad ; but they were wrong both as to toads and to Mrs. Grimalkin, for it is well known now that toads are not spiteful, and if toads are not spiteful, then Mrs. Grimalkin was not spiteful either. For the rest, she always wears black, has a brown wig, excellent false teeth, and is one of the few women left who take snuff.

When Amicia arrived Mrs. Grimalkin was busy with what she called her "cases."

"I am so glad to see you, dear Lady Sweetapple,"

said Mrs. Grimalkin. "Is there anything that I can do for you?"

"You really might do me a very great service," said Amicia—"you who know every one and everything."

"What is it?" said Mrs. Grimalkin, her bright eyes sparkling with curiosity, for she well knew that Amicia would not have been so urgent unless she had something very much at heart. "Is it anything about one of my 'cases'?" And as she said this she pointed to a sort of ledger.

"It's about a young person I want to put out as a governess," said Amicia. "I thought it so likely that you would know of a situation in which a poor girl would be comfortable."

"Oh," said Mrs. Grimalkin, "I thought it might be a scarlet fever case, or a small-pox case, or," sinking her voice to a whisper, and hissing, we must say, very like a toad, "maternity case. I have cases of all sorts. Here's a young woman who has just been taken with small-pox at her place; another with scarlet fever; another with mumps; and here's a poor woman whose husband has run away from her after living with her eight months—that's my maternity case."

"It's no case at all like that," said Amicia. "It

has nothing to do with marriage or maternity. I want a place for a young person as a governess."

"It's very odd," said Mrs. Grimalkin, rubbing her skinny brown hands, much as a toad rubs his fore-feet together—"it's very odd, but there is what I may call a run on governesses to-day. It is not two hours ago since Mr. Fortescue was here asking me to get a place for a governess."

"Indeed!" said Amicia, feeling very confused; "and pray what was her name?"

"That, my dear," said Mrs. Grimalkin, "if you'll allow me to say so, is a very indiscreet question. Mr. Fortescue never told me the name of the young lady. He called her a young lady, and not, as you call your object, a young person; and as he did not tell me her name, and as his visit came to nothing, I did not ask it."

"It must be Edith Price," thought Amicia; and then she went on aloud—"And so his visit came to nothing?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Grimalkin, refreshing herself with a pinch of snuff—some of Lord Harrington's mixture, which her brother, Lord Tabbicat, had bought at his sale. "Yes; young men are so particular nowadays. I read him out ever so many eligible situations, but he turned up his nose at all

of them, and went away saying none of *those* would suit."

"Perhaps I am not so particular," said Amicia. "Your impression, I suppose, was that Mr. Fortescue was not in earnest about this situation."

"I cannot go so far as to say so much as that," said Mrs. Grimalkin, "but he seemed inclined to pick and choose. The idea of a governess picking and choosing is quite preposterous."

"Quite so; it is disgusting," said Amicia.

After another pinch of Harrington's mixture, Mrs. Grimalkin went on—

"Shall I read you out a few of my governess cases, then you'll be able to judge for yourself? Here's first," read out Mrs. Grimalkin, putting on her spectacles, "a situation in the Regent's Park."

"That won't do at all," said Amicia, so abruptly that the toad—we beg her pardon, Mrs. Grimalkin—turned her bright eyes on her to see what was the matter.

"Not take a situation in the Regent's Park! Why, you are as particular as Mr. Fortescue."

"I may say at once," said Amicia, "that the young person whom I wish to serve has a great objection to a situation in town, or near it; at least, her friends wish her to be in the country."

“Oh, I see,” said Mrs. Grimalkin. “It is quite a comfort to find even a governess who has no objection to go into the country.”

“Indeed it is,” said Amicia, “and that’s why I hope you will be able to help us. The farther she is removed from town, the better this young person will be pleased.”

“Well, well,” said Mrs. Grimalkin, “I think I shall be able to please her. I suppose, as she doesn’t mind going into the country, she is fully competent to teach young children all the usual branches of a sound and useful education.”

“You may rely upon it,” said Amicia, “that this young person is well qualified for her duties in every particular.”

Here we stop, gentle reader, to beg you of your charity to forgive Lady Sweetapple for telling such a story. She knew nothing of Edith Price’s attainments, and yet she was giving her a first-rate character. You must recollect that Amicia was very much in love with Harry Fortescue, and ready to do and to say anything to get Edith Price out of the way.

“That makes the recommendation for a country situation so much easier,” said Mrs. Grimalkin. “It is a sad thing for a family in Wales to have a young

person palmed off on them upon false representations, and then to find that she cannot speak a word of French, or even play her scales."

"Do you think I would impose upon you, dear Mrs. Grimalkin?" said Amicia, with her sweetest smile.

"I feel quite comfortable about this young person, whom you seem to know so well," said Mrs. Grimalkin; "and I shall have great pleasure in recommending your friend. Let me see what will suit her. She doesn't mind distance from London. Do you think she would object to South Wales?"

"South Wales would suit her admirably," said Amicia. "How far is it off by railway?"

"Oh, a weary way, as I know to my cost," said Mrs. Grimalkin; "for I went down to stay with this very family last year. I was tired to death, and nearly ruined by trains and flies."

"What is the name of the family?" asked Amicia.

"Mumbles," said Mrs. Grimalkin. "Mumbles of Mumbles, near Milford Haven. It is a charming part of the country, when you have got to it."

"And what are the advantages of the situation?" said Amicia.

"The Mumbles," said Mrs. Grimalkin, with

dignity, "are not a wealthy family. The property is pretty good, but old Mr. Mumbles, whom I remember when I was a girl, got into difficulties. He was a friend of the Duke of York, and lent him money. The Duke always said he would do something for Mumbles when he came to the throne, but as you know he never came to the throne, and so poor Mumbles got nothing. How true is it, dear Lady Sweetapple," Mrs. Grimalkin went on, in a religious fit, "how true it is that we should never put our trust in princes! The Bible is always right, and if Mr. Mumbles had only attended to its divine injunction he would never have got into difficulties. Well, he died, leaving a very encumbered estate. What did young Mumbles do to retrieve the fortunes of the family? Why, he went and married a woman without a farthing, and has had twelve children. You understand now, my dear, why the Mumbles can't afford to ruin themselves in an extravagant governess."

"No one can expect them to pay more than they can afford. A man is not bound to ruin himself to educate his children," said Amicia.

"Quite so," said Mrs. Grimalkin; "and how fortunate it is for us both, dear Lady Sweetapple, that I am not married, and you have no children!"

Here Mrs. Grimalkin refreshed herself with a philosophic pinch of snuff.

“But what is the salary?—for it comes to that after all,” said Amicia.

“The salary?” said Mrs. Grimalkin. “Let me see what they say about salary. Oh, they give no salary. They wish for a young person to teach six young children, three boys and three girls—fine high-spirited children all of them—and to be always with them, and in return they will treat her as one of the family, and pay her fare down. What do you think of that?”

“I think it will not suit my young friend.” Fancy Amicia calling Edith her friend! “Not at all, I should say. She must have some salary, or how is she to dress herself?”

“There’s very little dressing in South Wales,” said Mrs. Grimalkin apologetically, as if she were bound to defend the honour of the Mumbles family.

“I suppose they wear some dress?” said Amicia drily.

“Of course they do,” said Mrs. Grimalkin, the blood of the house of Tabbicat rising to her brown cheeks. “They are not like the Ancient Britons, who dressed in woad and amber beads. All I meant was that the Mumbles see little company, and,

if they wished it, they could not be extravagant in dress near Milford Haven."

"The Mumbles will not do," said Amicia, who felt that if she were to get Edith out of town, she must have something to offer her.

"But the Mumbles are such a charming family," Mrs. Grimalkin persisted. "It is true, dear Mrs. Mumbles is a little deaf, and one always has to raise one's voice in talking to her, but what exertion is that to a healthy young person. If your friend would only reflect on it, I think the situation might suit her. It has great prospective advantages."

"I see none either in the present or the future," said Amicia.

"There you are wrong," said Mrs. Grimalkin; "for dear Mrs. Mumbles, in her very last letter, said the only reason why their last governess left was that she had married the rector of the parish. It is quite true, I believe, that the rectory is only worth thirty pounds a year, but it is a great social rise for a governess to marry a rector; and, if you reflect on it, you will see that a rectory with thirty pounds a year is very tempting to a governess who has no salary."

"I have not the least doubt the Mumbles are very charming," said Amicia; "but my young

friend must have some salary; that is a *sine qua non*."

"Then," said Mrs. Grimalkin, leaning over her case-book, "there are the Peregrines in Monmouthshire. That's a nice out-of-the-way place; a good way from London, and thirty miles from any railway. They live at Peregrinestow, and came in with the Conquest. Mr. Peregrine is a widower; that might be an objection to your young friend, and hardly proper; but then there is one comfort, Mr. Peregrine is a lunatic, and is constantly guarded by his keeper. There are five children there, very unruly and neglected, for poor Mrs. Peregrine has been dead some years. They are wards in Chancery, and are educated under an order of the Court. The property is small, and the Court only allows thirty pounds a year for the education of the children. Do you think that would suit you?"

"I am afraid not," said Amicia; "I should not like to send my friend into a lunatic's house, fearing he might cut her throat."

"Oh, dear, no!" said Mrs. Grimalkin; "there's no fear of that. Mr. Peregrine is too great a gentleman to raise his hand against a lady. There was a story, now I recollect, that he used to beat poor Mrs. Peregrine, but it was never proved; and, after

all, if a man is to beat any woman, he may as well beat his wife as any one else. I should think your friend need be under no alarm as to Mr. Peregrine."

"The Peregrines will not do any more than the Mumbles," said Amicia.

"Then I am afraid I can't help you just now," said Mrs. Grimalkin. "In town; or near town, there are several situations I could mention. The Trowels in the Regent's Park. Mr. Trowel rose from being a journeyman mason. They give fifty pounds a year. The Portefeuilles in Grosvenor Street; they were French emigrants originally, you know, and have been always in official life ever since. Very capable people are the Portefeuilles, and very much respected; you meet them everywhere. They want a thorough good governess, and will give one hundred pounds a year; but perhaps your young friend might not be equal to such a situation. Then near Croydon are the Saint Mungos, a very old Scotch family, one of whom went into trade in Glasgow, and made a fortune in the tea and sugar line. They are very well off, and live partly in town and partly in the country. Mrs. Saint Mungo has an only daughter, and will give seventy pounds a year. Then, I see, Lady Onechicken, whose daughter, the great heiress, is married at last, wants

a young lady as a secretary. She is a very severe, hard woman, and I would not recommend any friend of mine to go to her; but she will pay very well. Then there's——"

"Nothing near town or in town will suit my friend," said Amicia. "I am so sorry to have taken up so much of your valuable time, dear Mrs. Grimalkin, and all to no purpose."

"Don't mention it," said Mrs. Grimalkin. "I am only too ready to help my friends when I can; but then," she added, as she reflected on Harry Fortescue and Amicia's scruples, "but then they must not be too particular."

So Amicia went away as she came, resolved to get Edith out of town, but feeling it was not so easy to find her a situation as she had expected.





CHAPTER XI.

LADY CHARITY HELPS AMICIA.

THERE'S no help for it," said Amicia, as she stepped into her carriage—"I must try dear Lady Charity."

"Drive to Lady Charity's," she said, and she soon alighted at her door.

"Glad to see you again, Amicia dear," said Lady Charity. "I suppose you have come to settle something about Ascot."

"No, I have not," said Amicia, in a very excited way. "I have come to make a confession. There's a young person I wish to get out of town."

"And that young person's name," said Lady Charity, "is——"

"Edith Price!" As she said this she threw her arms round Lady Charity's neck, and burst into tears.

"Why, what is the matter, Amicia darling?" said Lady Charity, taking her by both her hands. "What's Edith Price to you?"

“A great deal more than the whole world just now, except Harry Fortescue. Edith Price stands between me and him, and I want to get her a situation as governess, and to send her out of town at once.”

“But does she want to be a governess?” said Lady Charity. “If she does not, it’s no use trying to get her to go.”

“That’s my only chance,” said Amicia; “she does want to be a governess; and if I can send her off at once, before harm comes, I shall be so happy.” And then she began to sob and sigh again.

“Amicia,” said Lady Charity, “don’t be silly, and lose your head. Is Edith Price thoroughly respectable?”

“Entirely so, on my honour,” said Amicia, warmly.

“I would rather have it on her honour than on yours,” said Lady Charity; “but I daresay it all comes to the same thing. Amicia, I think I can find you a situation for her.”

“Oh! thank you so much,” said Amicia; “but it must be in the country, and it must be good enough to tempt her out of town.”

“It is a good situation,” said Lady Charity, “and

it is out of town—down in Norfolk, near King's Lynn."

"So much the better," said Amicia. "Are they friends of yours?"

"Old friends," said Lady Charity. "They are my cousins, the Blicklings. There are two little girls, and Mrs. Blickling will give a hundred pounds a year; but then she must have a ladylike person, with a thorough knowledge of French and music."

With Lady Charity Amicia knew she could be more confidential than she had been with Mrs. Grimalkin. Lady Charity knew all about her feeling for Harry, and she had nothing to conceal.

"I am sure," she said, "I can't say whether Miss Price knows music and French thoroughly. I do not even know if she is ladylike or a lady. In fact, I know nothing about her, except that she has an attraction for Harry Fortescue."

"I don't think you even know as much as that," said Lady Charity. "You're afraid, Amicia, that's all. There's only one thing to be done. You or I must see Miss Price, and then we shall be able to say whether we can offer her the situation. All I can say is, that if she answers the requirements of Mrs. Blickling she can have the situation."

"She must and shall have it," said Amicia.

"In my school-days, I remember," said Lady Charity, "we used to be told 'shall' for the king, and 'must' for the queen; but I suppose it's all altered now."

"Well," said Amicia, "which of us shall see her—you or I?"

"I think you had better not see her," said Lady Charity. "Your feelings are too much engaged. I will see her to-morrow morning, if that will suit you."

Now, Amicia, to tell the truth, would have given a good deal to see her rival, as she was convinced Edith Price was; but she could not help seeing that what Lady Charity said was right, and that she had better not see her, so she said—

"Very well."

"I will write her a line to-night," said Lady Charity, "informing her that I hear she is looking out for a situation, and that if she is inclined to call on me at eleven o'clock to-morrow, I shall be able to offer her one which it might suit her to accept. I shall then be able to judge both as to her respectability and her acquirements."

"You are an angel, dear Lady Charity!" said Amicia, kissing her on both cheeks.

“You have called me that before,” said Lady Charity, “and I do not at all feel as if I deserved the endearing name; but I will do what I can to help you.”

“So different from Mrs. Grimalkin,” said Amicia, as she drove off. “That’s what I call a reliable, trustworthy friend.”

And so she drove home, feeling much easier in her mind than she had been, as she expressed it, “for ages.”

Now let us return to Harry and Edward. After Edward Vernon had left Harry a sufficient time by himself to have written twenty letters, he went into the waiting-room, and saw him still sitting doing nothing at the table.

“This will never do,” said Edward. “I must go in and take him out for a walk. What a silly fellow he is! he’ll find it all right with Florry as soon as he sees her at Ascot.”

So he went in and tapped him on the shoulder, and Harry turned round as sharply as though a serpent had stung him.

“I say, Harry,” said Edward, “won’t you come out for a walk? The sun isn’t so hot now.”

“Whither shall we walk?” asked Harry stupidly; “down to chambers?”

"Down to chambers of a June afternoon!" said Edward; "why, even those pale-faced fellows at Mr. Sheepskin's would laugh if they saw us. As for Bowker, he's away at Greenwich or Richmond. Oh, no; if we go anywhere, it must be to the Park."

"What shall we do in the Park?" asked Harry, whose head was full of Edith Price, and thought there was no street in the world so adapted for a constitutional as Lupus Street.

"Do? why, do as we have done a thousand times before—sit on chairs, and talk and bow to our friends."

"That ass Pantouffles is sure to be there," said Harry. "I can't bear Pantouffles."

"He's sure to be there," said Edward; "but he'll be so full of bowing he will not bore us by conversation. After all, I don't think he's such a bad fellow."

"Well, let us go," said Harry, with the air of a victim.

It was very hot, and as soon as they got to the top of the Row they sat down under the shade of the trees, just where they could command the Row and the Drive. Sure enough, they had not been there five minutes before they saw Count Pantouffles and Mr. Beeswing coming up to them. Right and

left Count Pantouffles bowed, and right and left Mr. Beeswing smiled and said witty things, so that, though they were near, their progress was slow.

“Here they come, mind and matter,” said Edward. “Why should not poor Pantouffles bow, if he hasn’t anything better to do? Besides, he does it so beautifully.”

“Mind and matter!” re-echoed Harry Fortescue; “I should rather call them head and hatter.”

“Call them what you will, Harry,” said Edward, “only cheer up a little. Here they are.”

“Oh!” said Mr. Beeswing, recognising them, “here are the fugitives. Well, Harry, did you find E. P. all right, and did you draw the cheque when you got up to town?”

“Oh, yes,” said Edward Vernon, answering for Harry, “it was all right; but Harry has not been very well since he came back, and so I have brought him out here to have a little air.”

“You’re going to Ascot, of course?” said Count Pantouffles.

“Yes,” said Edward; “we are both going. I hope we shall have good fun, and that the racing will be good.”

“I hope the Baron’s horses are in good form.

See if he doesn't win the Ascot Stakes. He's always lucky there."

"We shall see," said Edward.

"I'll bet you a pony against the favourite for the Cup," said Mr. Beeswing.

"Thank you," said Edward. "I never bet; I can't afford it."

"Why, Harry," said Mr. Beeswing, turning to Harry, who sat in his chair, looking at least as idiotic as Count Pantouffles, "where's your tongue? You haven't spoken a word either to the Count or me since we came up. It's very rude of you. I have heard of young gentlemen leaving their hearts in the country, but never their tongues. Why don't you say something?"

"It is very hot," said Harry.

"So it was yesterday," replied Mr. Beeswing; "and so it will be to-morrow. If it doesn't rain the weather will be fine. Have you any more truisms?"

Before Harry could answer, Count Pantouffles raised his hat, with one of those magical bows which had made him his world-wide reputation, and when they all turned in that direction, they saw Amicia dashing down the drive in her open carriage.

"There she goes," said Mr. Beeswing. "What a

pace she gets out of that pair. Well, they are grand steppers."

As one bow makes many, Mr. Beeswing bowed, and Edward bowed, and even Harry bowed, though he was the last of all. Amicia saw them all at a glance, and gave them a circular bow—one that took them all in at once; and when she had ended that, she gave Harry a little private particular bow all to himself. There was not time for anything more, and then she was gone.

"She looks very well," said Mr. Beeswing, "though she was so disappointed on Saturday when somebody went to town."

"How did you leave Mr. Sonderling?" said Edward, trying to turn the conversation.

"Oh," said Mr. Beeswing, "he was as good as a play on Saturday and Sunday, and he ended by giving us a lecture on atheism lying on the grass on Sunday afternoon."

"I do think he is a big ass," said Count Pantouffles. "It is a disgrace to Germany that such a fool should be allowed to settle in England."

"Why don't they recall him to the fatherland to serve in the Landsturm?" said Mr. Beeswing. "I am sure we could very well spare him."

Then, as Harry showed no symptoms of returning

animation, Mr. Beeswing said, "I think, count, as Harry is so dull we won't disturb his meditations any longer. Let us walk a little farther down under the shade of the trees. Good-bye, Harry; I hope to see you at Ascot in better form."

"Good-bye," said Harry, mechanically; and so they parted.

"I tell you what, Harry," said Edward: "this will never do. You really must have advice. Tell me what will do you any good."

"Nothing that you can do," said Harry. "There is only one thing that can do me any good."

"Tell me what it is, and I'll do it," said Edward. "Shall I go down to High Beech and make it up for you with Florry?"

"I don't want to make it up with Florry," said Harry. "I tell you what, Ned: you stay quietly here, while I take a walk by myself."

"I shall do nothing of the kind," said Edward angrily. "I tell you I will never leave you, and I shall go with you wherever you go."

"Well," said Harry, "let us take a stroll. I'm bored to death with the Row and the Drive."

"I'll go wherever you like," said Edward Vernon; and they started.

On and on they walked, through Albert Gate,

where they were nearly run over in crossing, because a policeman would try and help them over; then they went down William Street, and along Lowndes Square.

“Shall we go in and have an ice?” said Edward, when they passed Gunter’s. It was so hot, and he knew Harry, when he was in his right mind, was fond of ice.

“No,” said Harry, as if poor Edward had asked him to break, not one, but all the Commandments.

“Oh, I thought——” said Edward.

“Come along,” said Harry savagely. “You oughtn’t to think.”

Edward, however, looked at him reproachfully, as a lamb may look at the butcher about to cut its throat, but he said nothing.

“I see it,” he thought: “he wants to call on Lady Sweetapple, and he is afraid, because he has already called on her once to-day.”

But they passed Nos. 12, 11, 10, and, in fact, all the numbers in Lowndes Street, without stopping at any of them. We are not going to tell you at what number Amicia lived; for who can tell whether she lives there in 1872, as she lived there in 1870. You all of you are aware, of course, that in coming from Lowndes Square you meet the numbers as we

have mentioned them, and that when you have reached No. 1 you are at the end of the street.

“He is very cunning,” thought Edward, after they had passed Amicia’s house; “he wants to ring, but he can’t make up his mind. He’ll turn round in a minute and go back to her house.”

But Edward Vernon was mistaken. On Harry walked in a dreamy way along Chesham Place and Chesham Street—which those who live in Chesham Place wish to heaven were called by any other name, for do they not get all their letters and cards mis-sent to the numbers in Chesham Street which correspond to theirs? When they got to the end of Chesham Street, Edward had another conjecture, which was confirmed when Harry turned down Eaton Place.

“How stupid I was!” he thought. “Of course he is going to call on Lady Charity, and to thank her for asking us so kindly to Ascot.”

But, no! Harry had only gone into Eaton Place to get into Eccleston Street, and he showed no inclination to call on Lady Charity.

So on and on they went, down Eccleston Street, across Eaton Square, where Edward saw a lot of girls hard at croquet, and did long so very much that he were at High Beech, playing the same game,

or any game, with Alice Carlton. But Harry looked neither to the right nor to the left. He sped on like a somnambulist, and passed quickly across the square, and then still along Eccleston Street, across Chester Square, and across Eccleston Bridge. Up to that time Edward, though he was rather shy of making any more guesses, was firmly convinced that Harry was going home to Mrs. Boffin's for some inscrutable purpose. He was even reduced to fancying that he had lost an important button, or that the stud at his neck, on which all the other studs depended, had started out, and that he was afraid of coming to pieces. Nay, he even went so low as his feet, and felt sure he was going home to change a tight boot. But when he saw Eccleston Bridge in sight he was at the end of all his conjectures, and ventured to ask Harry whither they were going.

"You'll see all in good time," said Harry, in so sad a voice that Edward was glad he had gone with him, for he was afraid he was making straight for Thames Bank to throw himself in.

So on and on they went, down the great social desert that begins beyond Warwick Square, and perhaps even on this side of it, and that stupid Edward did not know whither they were going till they came to a long, straggling street, half shops,

half lodging-houses, and when he looked up at its name he saw they had got into Lupus Street.

"Why, here we are in Lupus Street!" he said. "What a long street it must be; it meets one everywhere."

"Yes," said Harry moodily, "I know we are in Lupus Street. This is where I wanted to come. I wanted to call on the Prices."

"Why, you called there yesterday," said Edward.

"I know I did," said Harry; "and I promised them to go back as soon as I had got some information; and now I have got it, and am going to tell it."

If Harry had been sharp, he would have seen that both he and Edward were great objects of curiosity to Mr. Leek, close to whose shop at the corner they were standing; but as Harry and Edward were both in love, and love is blind, they saw nothing. But Mr. Leek saw them, and pointed them out to Mrs. Leek.

"Look, Jemima Ann, there's the two young gents I told you of. There they go, as cool as coveumbers, up to call on Miss Price, in the broad light of day."

"Then they may spare themselves the trouble,"

said Mrs. Leek; "for I seen Miss Price go out for a walk with her sister a while back."

But as Harry did not know this, and as Edward could not stop him, they walked up to the door, and, when it was opened, all they could learn from Betsy was that Miss Edith and her sister had gone out for a walk after they had had their tea.

"How provoking!" said Harry, with a most injured air.

"Whatever you have to tell about the situation will keep very well till to-morrow, I suppose?" said Edward.

"So it will. What a fool I am!" said Harry. So he left his card, which Betsy, whose fingers were dirty with scrubbing, took in a corner of her apron; and after begging her to tell Miss Price that he would call to-morrow afternoon, as he had something particular to say, the two friends walked off again to dine at the club.

"I feel much easier now," said Harry; and for the rest of the evening he was tolerably cheerful.

"I am sure I am," said Edward. "I declare, for ever so long I could not make out what was the matter with you."



CHAPTER XII.

EDITH PRICE ACCEPTS A SITUATION.



THAT night, before going to bed, Lady Charity wrote the following note to Edith Price:—

“No. —, Eaton Place,
“June 6th, 1870.

“Lady Charity presents her compliments to Miss Price, and having been informed by a friend that Miss Price is anxious to undertake the duties of a governess, will be happy to see Miss Price, if she can make it convenient to call at this address to-morrow morning between eleven and twelve o'clock.”

She sent it by hand, so that she might be sure that Edith had received it. I hope no one will cry out that Lady Charity was wrong in presenting her compliments to an intending governess, and that she should rather have written, “Lady Charity

desires that Miss Edith Price," &c., for, in our opinion, she was quite right to word her note as we have given it.

The note was put into Edith's hands just as she was going to bed by Betsy, who had taken it in.

"A letter for you, Miss Edith, left by a footman with a powdered 'ead."

Edith took it and read it. "This is Mr. Fortescue's doing," she said. "How very kind of him!"

Then she went to bed, and dreamt she was teaching at least twenty little boys and girls to read and write and talk French; but when they all began to practice their scales at once, the discord was so dreadful that she sprung bolt upright in bed, and said, "Dear me! thank heaven it was only a dream."

Early next morning Edith told her mother of Lady Charity's note.

"It is very kind of Mr. Fortescue," said Mrs. Price. "No doubt Lady Charity is one of his great friends."

"I suppose she is," said Edith.

"You must mind, Edith, that the family to which you may be going is one of respectability and position," said Mrs. Price.

"You may rely upon that, mother," said Edith, as she left the room to put on her velvet jacket.

It did not take her long to walk from Lupus Street to Eaton Place, and Edith got there at half-past eleven. She was admitted at once, and found Lady Charity in the library on the ground-floor.

Now it must be confessed that, though Lady Charity had been prepared to see a pretty girl, she was not prepared for such loveliness as Edith Price presented. She saw at once that she must be a dangerous rival to any woman, and quite agreed with Amicia in thinking that the sooner she and Harry Fortescue were parted the better.

"I have heard, Miss Price," she began, "that you are anxious to undertake a situation as governess in a gentleman's family."

"Yes, I am," said Edith, who did not like to mention Harry Fortescue's name in the matter, or to ask how Lady Charity had heard it.

"I have it in my power," said Lady Charity, "to offer you a very advantageous position in a family who reside in Norfolk; but it is absolutely necessary that you should accept my offer at once, as the situation cannot be kept open."

"I am ready to go as soon as you please," said Edith.

“Very well, then,” said Lady Charity, with a kindly smile, “that will simplify matters very much. And now let me hear something of your qualifications for the post.”

So Edith gave an account of herself, how she had spent the last four years in France, and so spoke that language fluently. And Lady Charity asked her a few questions in that language, which she answered in far better French than Lady Charity could command.

“Music is also essential,” said Lady Charity. “Would you mind playing me something on that instrument,” pointing to a piano in the corner of the room.

So Edith sat down, and after she had played parts of several pieces to Lady Charity’s satisfaction—for she was a far better judge of music than of French, as is the case with many elderly ladies—she said—

“Well, my dear Miss Price, I really think I shall be able conscientiously to recommend you for the situation of which I spoke, and——” But before she could finish her sentence the door opened, and “Lady Sweetapple” was announced.

The fact was, that Amicia could neither bear the suspense of waiting to know whether her scheme would succeed, nor the curiosity which she felt to

behold the woman whom she fancied to be her rival. A sudden thought had seized her, and she fancied that if she came in, as if by accident, during the interview of Edith Price with Lady Charity, she should have an opportunity of judging whether her suspicions were well founded, and E. P. really so formidable as to render it necessary that she should be sent out of town. At any rate, there she was, and Lady Charity had to make the best of her.

“My dear Lady Sweetapple,” said Lady Charity, “I am so glad you have come. This is the Miss Price of whom I spoke to you yesterday, and just as you came in I was about to conclude an engagement for her to enter into the Blickling family as governess. I am quite satisfied with my interview; but as my French is not nearly so good as yours, would you mind speaking a little to Miss Price in French?”

“Certainly not,” said Amicia, who had been struck at once with Edith’s beauty, and who was overjoyed at the prospect of sending her out of town as soon as possible. If any of you ask why Edith Price did not wear her veil down, we are sure we cannot tell. For ourselves, we would never engage as a governess any woman, young or old, who wore her veil down. Suppose she turned out to be the pig-

faced lady, and frightened all the little children of the family into which she entered out of their seven senses. We will not go so far as to say that none but ugly women wear their veils down, but only that Edith did not wear hers down, and that she was very lovely. Amicia, therefore, had every opportunity of seeing how dangerous she might be, if any young man took a fancy to her.

Then Amicia and Edith began to speak French, which the former Miss "Smeess" spoke like a native. After this had lasted a little time, Amicia said—

"This is very pure French—a good choice of words, and an excellent accent. I am quite satisfied with Miss Price's French."

"Then we may conclude it as settled," said Lady Charity. "By the way, Miss Price, there is one thing more to ask. Would you have any objection to tell us a little of your family and your past life?"

So poor Edith had to begin from the beginning: how her father had a college living and taken pupils, and been drowned; how his death left his family in destitute circumstances; how the kindness of friends had supported them in France; and how, when her education had been

completed, she had come to London, not long ago, to try to get a situation as a governess.

"A very sad story, indeed," said Lady Charity; "it quite makes my heart bleed to hear it. I would not have asked for it had it not been absolutely necessary."

"I know it is necessary," said Edith. "But now, will you tell me something about the family into which you propose so kindly that I should accept a situation?"

"The Blicklings are a family of the first distinction," said Lady Charity, "and Mrs. Blickling is a cousin of my own. I am sure you will like the situation. The salary will be a hundred pounds a year."

Poor Edith's eyes glistened when she heard the sum named. Was she really going to earn all that money for herself by her own exertion!

"You said," Lady Charity went on, "that your father took pupils. Can you tell me the names of any of those pupils?"

Edith Price hesitated a little at this question; she knew that there was no harm in mentioning the names of Harry Fortescue and Edward Vernon, and yet she did not like to name them.

"You must be able to remember some of them," said Lady Charity.

It seemed so stupid not to be able to answer so simple a question, that Edith was forced to say—

“Two of my father’s pupils were Mr. Harry Fortescue and Mr. Edward Vernon, whom, perhaps, you may know.”

“Not intimately,” said Lady Charity; “but I have often heard of them, and seen them in society.”

“They have been very kind to my mother, and to all of us,” said Edith.

“I think,” said Lady Charity, “as you seem peculiarly fitted for the situation which Mrs. Blickling offers, that I may close with you at once. The only condition is, that you should go down to Norfolk as soon as possible. How soon could you go?”

“I can go at once,” said Edith. “To-morrow, if you please.”

“Let it be to-morrow, then,” said Lady Charity. “I will write to Mrs. Blickling to-night and tell her to send to meet you at the station.”

So, after fuller explanations, with which we need not trouble the reader, it was arranged that Edith Price should be Mrs. Blickling’s governess, and, with many thanks to Lady Charity for her kindness, she took her departure in better spirits than she had been for a very long time.

As soon as she was gone, Lady Charity said to Amicia—

“There, my dear, that is settled; and now, tell me what you think of her. I call her lovely.”

“I think she is very pretty,” said Amicia. “Far too good-looking for a governess; but, to my taste, rather too dark. But I am glad she is going to Norfolk, for some people like dark young persons.”

“Now, look at me, Amicia,” said Lady Charity; and accordingly Amicia looked at her kindly face.

“You see now, I hope,” said Lady Charity, “what all your jealousy comes to, and what a mare’s nest you have built for yourself. This poor girl is the daughter of Mr. Fortescue’s former tutor, and that’s why he and Mr. Vernon take such an interest in her. Are you not ashamed of yourself?”

“Not at all,” said Amicia. “It is one thing to take an interest, and another to be constantly calling on a young person, and such an attractive young person as this. Then there is the missing cheque, and the advertisement, and the going to church, not to mention Harry Fortescue’s manner whenever even the name of Price is mentioned. No; I am not at all ashamed of myself, and I shall be ever grateful to you, darling Lady Charity, for despatching Miss Edith Price so quickly and so cleverly

to Norfolk. I hope she will stay there a very long while."

"I am sure I hope so," said Lady Charity; "for I feel as though I were sending to Mrs. Blickling for a governess one of the most charming young persons possible."

"I need no further proof as to her dangerous qualities," said Amicia, "than the fact that you fall in love with the young person as soon as you see her. I think I am ten times more jealous of her since I have seen her."

"Pray, don't be silly, dear Amicia," said Lady Charity. "These are all idle fancies. Don't you see, that having found out a perfectly natural reason for Mr. Fortescue's attention to the Price family, you ought to be quite convinced that there is nothing further between Mr. Fortescue and Miss Price?"

"No, I do not see it," said Amicia doggedly, rising to go away. "But, dear Lady Charity, do see that this young person goes down to Norfolk to-morrow."

"I will do my best," said Lady Charity; and with this comfort Lady Sweetapple took her departure.

"I wonder what Harry Fortescue can see in such a black-looking creature," said Amicia, as she

stepped into her carriage. "But there is no accounting for tastes."

In a few minutes she was in her boudoir in Lowndes Street, in consultation with Mrs. Crump as to the approaching Ascot campaign.

"Mamma, dear," said Edith, almost bursting into her mother's room, and throwing herself on the invalid's bed, "I have seen such a charming old lady, and she has promised me a situation as governess at a hundred pounds a year. Is not that nice?"

"I shall be very sorry to part with you, Edith," said Mrs. Price, after Edith had told her story. "What I shall do without you God only knows; but He knows best, and it is clearly your duty to accept this offer."

"I can't bear to think of going," said Edith, "and Mary is much on my mind; but I have settled that you must have a maid of your own to attend on you and go out with Mary, and the first thing that I shall do with my money will be to pay that maid."

"Just like you, Edith—always so considerate. Affliction has made you thoughtful before your years."

"Oh, mother!" said Edith, "I am so glad to be

going, and so sorry to go and leave you and Mary and Mrs. Nicholson, and," she added, with a little pause, "Mr. Fortescue. He will never believe it, for he said only yesterday he was quite sure I should never get a situation to suit me."

"The great reason why you should take it," said Mrs. Price, "is, that it will lessen our obligations to those two noble-minded young men."

"Yes," said Edith, "I think Mr. Fortescue is very noble-minded, and so kind and considerate."

"In those respects you are his equal," said Mrs. Price, fondly kissing her daughter. Then she added, sadly—

"You will think of us often, Edith, when you are down in Norfolk; and of the old rectory house at Bourton, and the church, and your father's grave, and of the cypress we planted over it before we left. If I could only rest at last under that tree!"

"Mother, darling mother!" said Edith, "don't break my heart. Of course I shall think of you and of him, and of all you have said, and still more of the good darling mother you have ever been to me. Don't break my heart, mother;" and then she threw her arms round her mother's neck, and burst into tears.

"I did not mean to hurt your feelings, Edith,"

said Mrs. Price. "I never thought you would forget. Forgive me for what I said. Invalids, you know, are always peevish."

"You are always patient, mother dear," said Edith, kissing her again and again, and then rushing up to her own room to stifle her tears.

"I never considered how painful it is to lose those we love," said Edith. "Now I must break it to Mary."

"Mary dear, where are you?" she said; and when Mary came, Edith told her story, and Mary would not believe that she must lose Edith so soon; and there was more crying and more kissing, and then the two sisters sat, hand in hand, the very pictures of grief. How long they had remained in that position they knew not, till a knock came at the door, and Betsy's voice said—

"Miss Edith, Mr. Fortescue is in the back drawing-room, and wishes to see you."





CHAPTER XIII.

HARRY FORTESCUE MAKES UP HIS MIND TO PROPOSE.

POOOR Harry Fortescue! He at least had not had a good night. He tossed and turned, and his feet sought every corner of his bed, feeling for that cool spot which it is not destined to find in sweltering June in London. We very much doubt if Dives would feel as much pleasure in that drop of cold water as we all of us feel when we discover a cool place in bed. So Harry Fortescue had tossed and turned. He tried every position in vain; he kicked off the clothes; he lay on his back, his sides, first one side and then the other, on his face, with his arms out of bed; and when he had exhausted all these permutations, he thought of sleeping with his head out of the bottom of the bed—we need not say that all Mrs. Boffin's beds were regular old four-posters—with his feet on the bolster. At last he exclaimed, "I can't stand this any longer," and jumped out of bed, threw up the

window, and looked out. The air was full of that fragrance of new-mown hay which in June makes even the London night air sometimes so balmy.

“Oh,” he thought, “if I were with her away into the sweet country among the new-mown hay, that would be joy!” Then he thought of Ascot, and despised it. What were races to him? All at once he looked on them as a degrading amusement, and if it had not been for Edward’s sake he would throw up the engagement.

“Poor Edward,” he thought, “how happy he is! Shall I ever be so happy? After all, I make no progress. Edith must never be suffered to go out as a governess, and I must find out how her mind stands as to me. I wonder if she ever thinks of me, not as benefactor—what a cold thing it is to be a benefactor; one might as well be a grandfather as a benefactor to any one. Benefactor! the very word is ridiculous; what the slang term calls ‘un-English.’ No, not as a benefactor, but as a shorter and prettier word—the comparative of love. What is the comparative of love? Why, lover, to be sure. Yes, that will do as the comparative of love.”

So he went on looking out at Mrs. Boffin’s best front bedroom window, the wonder of policemen and market-gardeners, quite lost in his thoughts on

Edith, and careless of what all the police and market-gardeners in the world thought. You see that scarlet fever of the heart had completely mastered his moral constitution, and that Harry Fortescue was now hopelessly in love with Edith Price. It was quick work, we must all admit, but love and hate are the two plants which grow fastest in the human heart. Sown yesterday, shooting up to their full height to-day, to-morrow cut down and withered. Yes, the heart of man is the only true forcing-house. They say that of all growing things the quickest is a bamboo; it will grow ten inches in a night. Yes, love is like the bamboo; like it in more things than one—it is tender and green when it is young, but it hardens and stiffens quickly into a stick. How many are there not in life, who have found their early love turned in age into a stick for their own backs!

So Harry Fortescue stood there and thought, and thought, till the dusty, blazing summer sun came out without one breath of morning freshness, and the great desert of London streets was as parched and waterless as ever, and the Arabs that abound in them came out of their holes and began to prowl about. Even when a man is in love he sometimes feels ridiculous, and when a man feels in that state he

becomes like the ostrich, and tries to hide his head. As soon, therefore, as Harry Fortescue felt ridiculous he left the window, and withdrew to his dingy four-poster, where he fell asleep, only to be awakened when Mrs. Boffin's maid-of-all-work, an intelligent maiden of seventeen, came down the creaking stairs to her daily toil.

It has been often remarked, or if not it ought to be remarked, that lovers, as a rule, rise early and husbands late. There are exceptions, but that is the rule. Husbands and wives seldom have great thoughts to keep them awake, or to arouse them from their slumbers—they have had their great thoughts when they were young and in love; but lovers always have great thoughts, or thoughts that are great in their own imaginations: so it was with Harry Fortescue. That hour's sleep he had just had had stilled his restlessness. After the maid-of-all-work had roused him, he lay between the sheets like a lamb, thinking of Edith; and his first great thought was, that he would go and propose to her that very day, and his next that he was sure she would make him the very thing he needed—a loving, faithful wife. You see how wise he felt in his own conceit. He was, with his great thoughts, settling not only his own fate—that in all conscience

is hard enough to do—but the fate of another human being, and that being a woman to whom he had never spoken one word of love, and of whose feeling towards him, except in the odious light of a benefactor, he was utterly ignorant. Pray observe, too, the courage of love. Like faith, it can remove mountains, or it fancies it can remove them, which is much the same. Harry Fortescue, from the moment that he was in love with Edith Price, never doubted. As he lay there thinking on her, not at all distracted by the cries of the milkman or the scavenger, he was as firmly convinced that he should marry her as any zealot or bigot of the efficacy of his creed as the only means of salvation. He believed in himself, and so he must have her. But when young persons of either sex have this firm faith in themselves in matters of love, and do not get the object of their desires, what comes of it? Many things come of it—for in this very contrary world these shipwrecks happen every day of the week—despair, apathy, broken hearts, suicides, actual or figurative: and it is as well to know that a figurative or moral suicide is quite as melancholy to read of as any extinction of life by drowning or poison, by knife or pistol. The reason is not far to seek. When the human heart

is set on anything, it cannot bear to be upset— to have all its bread thrown out for many days, it may be, on the waters returned to its own bosom, not as bread, but as sop. Then it asserts its rights ; falls back on its own natural dignity ; will not love a generation which has treated it so badly ; grows morbid, and hates and detests it ; cares for no one and no thing ; will not have any rival near its own throne, though that throne be only a willow chair ; disdains even to live in such a wretched world, where the heart cannot have its way, and so ends in actual or moral death—a sad example of the vanity of human wishes.

But let us return to Harry Fortescue. He at least was not in this melancholy state. With him it made all the difference that he had not asked and been refused. He did not suppose, this spoiled and pampered child of love, that any woman would refuse him. Thus he lay still, till it was decent time to get up. He was a gentleman, and would have scorned to confound the poor maid-of-all-work by breaking in upon her when she was on her knees at her daily devotions to her work, scrubbing the stairs, brushing the grates, and whitening the door-steps. Her occupations, those labours which sanctified her life, were too holy for him. He lay in bed listening till he knew she had done her weary

task ; and he knew it at once when the portly form of Mrs. Boffin, going down-stairs to "her" breakfast, made them creak as with the weight of ten maids-of-all-work. There is something in ownership and tyranny which makes owners and tyrants—and Mrs. Boffin was a tyrant—tread earth and stairs in such a lordly way. You can always tell a landlord from a tenant by the depth of his foot-prints. With all his courage, which was undoubted, we question whether Harry Fortescue would have dared to get up before Mrs. Boffin went down. We are not sure, good lodger though he was, that Mrs. Boffin would not have given him warning on the spot. That either of "her gentlemen" should have got up before she had looked over their letters and put out their tea and sugar, was something so abhorrent to Mrs. Boffin's nature, that she would not have tolerated it for an instant. If lodgers wanted to rise early, they might go somewhere else. Besides, if they got up early they would wear out the furniture, sitting on the chairs and lying on the sofas ever so much longer. They might sit up as long as they liked, but as for getting up early, it was quite out of the question.

When Harry and Edward met at breakfast, Edward could not help saying—

"I have seen you looking fresher, Harry."

"How can a fellow look fresh," said Harry, "when the nights are so warm?"

"I feel fresh enough," remonstrated Edward.

"Ah, but then you're younger, Ned; and besides, you're happy."

There was an audacity about Harry's "younger" which made Edward Vernon smile, for he was by just three months the younger of the two.

"Younger, indeed!" said Edward. "All I know is, that when you die of old age I shall think it time to look out. Happy I am indeed. But why can't you be happy? I am sure Florry will be very glad to see you at Ascot."

"Florry Carlton is nothing to me," said Harry. "I don't care if I never see her again."

This declaration so shocked Edward Vernon that he ceased talking, and the two friends finished their breakfast in silence.

"I'm going out, Ned," said Harry, "and I sha'n't be back till dinner-time. We will dine at the club as usual."

"We're engaged to dine, both of us, with Mrs. Grimalkin," said Edward.

"What a bore!" said Harry. "How I do hate all the house of Tabbicat!"

“They’re a very old family,” said Edward, who, not being crossed in love, was not nearly such a radical as Harry had become in two days; “they say they came from the East.”

“I quite believe it,” said Harry. “I shouldn’t wonder if they came all the way from Egypt, where they used to worship cats. Puss-in-Boots was one cadet of the family, and Dick Whittington’s cat another. Didn’t Dick Whittington get his cat from the East? What I wish is, that all the old cats would go back to the East.”

“You’re very hard upon poor Mrs. Grimalkin for asking us to dinner,” said Edward; “but you know you can never be so rude as not to go after accepting her invitation.”

“Something may happen to me beforehand which may prevent my going,” said Harry, in a tone which gave Edward Vernon quite a turn. But while Edward was thinking of suicide, Harry was bent on proposing to Edith Price; and as he was quite sure that she would accept him, he felt that he should be so happy, that he could never bear to sit out one of Mrs. Grimalkin’s dull dinners.

“There’s another thing against Mrs. Grimalkin,” he said, as if he had found out against her all the

seven deadly sins at least, "she wasn't at all kind to the Prices when poor Mr. Price died."

"That's a long time ago," remonstrated Edward; "and besides, she knew little or nothing of the Prices."

"I can't excuse her," said Harry. "The fact is, Ned, you're too good-natured. It doesn't pay to waste one's kindness on old cats. But I suppose I must go. Good-bye. You won't see me till I come home to dress." And with these words he lighted his cigar and walked, or rather ran, out of the house.

Edward Vernon looked after him and shook his head. "He can't bear Florry Carlton to-day, and yesterday he couldn't abide Lady Sweetapple; and he won't dine with Mrs. Grimalkin because she wasn't kind to the Prices years ago. He's in bad form, poor fellow. The cigar is the only cheering thing about him. But it's no use following him and boring him; he must have his way." And then Edward Vernon threw himself into his easy-chair, lighted his cigar, and was soon deep in day-dreams about Alice Carlton.



CHAPTER XIV.

HARRY FORTESCUE SITS IN THE PARK.



HEN Harry Fortescue left Mrs. Boffin's, he thought he would just take a turn in Lupus Street, for you must know that No. — was fast becoming holy in his eyes. It contained his divinity, and he worshipped at that shrine. It mattered nothing that Lupus Street was a low, unfashionable street, he worshipped all the same; just as in the early ages men have worshipped misshapen stones or trunks of trees, and thought them all the more divine because they were deformed and monstrous—it was not so much the form or shape as the spirit which they enshrined. And so it was with Harry; Edith Price lived in Lupus Street, and that fact was quite enough to make Lupus Street, even architecturally, the most beautiful street to his eyes in all London.

“It's not so broad as some other streets,” he said, “and there are shops in it; but then it's easier to

see across it and look up at the windows; and a street with shops is always more lively than a street without them."

He had just come to this conclusion, when he reached the greengrocer's shop at the corner, and there stood Mr. Leek at his door, making his observations on men and things. Now it so happened that Mr. Leek on that morning had some beautiful strawberries in his window. As soon as Harry Fortescue saw them, he was struck by a sudden thought.

"Those are very fine strawberries," he said to Mr. Leek.

"Yes, sir," said Mr. Leek, "werry fine strawberries. Will you have a punnet?"

"I should like to have four punnets," said Harry, "if you will send them over the way, to No. —."

"Four punnets at half a crown will be ten shillings in all," said Mr. Leek, rubbing his hands. "They shall go in directly, sir. A werry nice young lady is Miss Price, sir. Shall I say who sent them?"

"You may say they are sent to Mrs. Price from a friend," said Harry with a sternness which not a little alarmed Mr. Leek.

"I beg your pardon, sir; but seein' you so often

in the street, and which it was only on Sunday last I see you walk to church with the young ladies, I made bold to say that Miss Price was a werry nice young lady."

"I think it would be better if you were to mind your own business, instead of watching your neighbours," said Harry, walking off, with the consciousness that his movements had been watched.

Mr. Leek looked after him, shaking his head as gravely as Edward Vernon had shaken his.

"Werry lucky I did not mention Miss Price before he paid for them strawberries, else he mightn't 'ave 'ad them. Minding one's own business, indeed! and not watch one's neighbours! Why, if arter a man 'as minded his own business all the week, he is not to watch his neighbours on Sundays, Hengland would become a land of 'orrid aristycrats, and not a country fit for free men to inhabit. I just wish that respectable young woman who was asking after the gent's proceedings were to come by now, I'd treat her to a punnet free gratis for nothing, and also tell her something which would astonish her."

After this patriotic outbreak, Mr. Leek put the half-sovereign which Harry had paid him into the till, sent over the strawberries as was desired, and

retreated growling, like a free and bearish Briton, into his back shop.

Harry Fortescue, to tell the truth, was rather scared by the greengrocer's familiarity, and thought it better to retire from Lupus Street for a season, that he might return with fresh force in the afternoon. He even reckoned the hour when he supposed Mr. Leek would be having his tea, and resolved to call then, that he might not be watched. Now see how provoking it was of Mr. Leek to scare him away ; for just after he had fled the street, out came Edith Price on her way, as we have seen, to Lady Charity. If Harry Fortescue could only have seen her before that interview, much might have happened ; and hence observe how little causes—sometimes so little as a familiar greengrocer—may prevent important results. Of course, Heaven rules everything ; but it really sometimes seems as if these little things on which so much turn were left out of consideration. In this instance, at least, much trouble would have been avoided if Mr. Leek had been overruled by Providence. After all, though, this is a sadly worldly view either of greengrocers or Providence. We know better ; for just as one sparrow does not fall to earth unheeded, so no greengrocer can step in to trouble our story unless he

were permitted to do so for the purpose of trying Harry Fortescue's faith. We do not, therefore, agree in the least with those who think that Providence in these old days of the world is growing short-sighted, and that virtue is not rewarded and vice punished in this wicked nineteenth century as surely as it was in earlier times; for the eyes of Providence never fail, nor shall its vision ever grow dim. If any one acts on the opposite conviction, he will, sooner or later, be convinced in another way.

As it was, Harry Fortescue did not meet Edith Price that morning, but went off into the Park and sat down on a chair. Now, sitting on a chair in the Park is a very different thing at different times of the day. Between ten and eleven you may sit on a chair and see no one sitting, except poor people resting on those free seats which the charity of the First Commissioner of Works has provided for the penniless public. You will sit alone in your grandeur, and watch the gambols of children and tiny things in purple and fine linen which can only just stand on their little legs. That may be called the nursemaid period of the day. Then, between eleven and twelve, is the young ladies' age, of young girls in hats not yet out, who come there with their

governesses and boy-brothers, and walk up and down, very rarely sitting. Then, between twelve and one, the grown people begin to arrive, and the crowd swells and swells, till about half-past one, when it begins to ebb, and the sitters begin to feel that there is such a thing as luncheon. In this latter period, your solitary sitter is no longer solitary. If his chair is well placed under the shade of a tree, its value rises rapidly after half-past twelve. About one, it attracts the longing eyes of fat old ladies and slim young girls. Popsy fathers stop and glare at you, and strong-minded aunts stare at you as though they would convert you into stone, grind you to bits, and hand you over to McAdam to mend the roads; and all for what?—that they may sit on that chair for half an hour. Some day or other there will be murder committed for a chair on a hot day in the height of the season. There is nothing that so excites the desires of the foot-sore multitude as to see young men sitting at their ease, admiring the horses and horsewomen, while they themselves have to plod on seeking in vain for something on which to rest, not their feet, but the small of their backs.

Through all these periods as possessor of a chair did Harry Fortescue pass on that memorable Wednesday

in June. Alas! on him were wasted the gambols of the children, the first footsteps of the babies, the charms of the young things in hats, the terrors of their governesses, the change in the company, the gradually gathering flood of sitters and walkers, the ease of those who had secured chairs, and the envy of those who had none; fathers and aunts, young men and maidens, members of parliament, peers, horsemen and horsewomen, not to mention horse-breakers, were all lost on him. He stared at everything, and yet he saw nothing, for in each of the pupils of his eyes was fixed the reflection of Edith Price's face; and that is really why lovers are blind, not so much because they cannot see, as because they can see nothing but the beloved object which, like a cuckoo, has thrown out all other objects from the rest of the vision, and insists upon being seen, and seen alone.

When a man, and especially a young man, is in this unhappy state, it matters little to him how long he sits. Time and space are nothing to him. They were made, as the song says, for "vulgar slaveys." A man in love lives only for the object of his affections and for himself. Harry Fortescue began to sit at half-past eleven, and he remained sitting till half-past three. The chairman of the assembly of

chairs came up to him several times and asked him for a fresh penny.

“I have not done my sitting,” said Harry.

“He sits hard—as hard as a turkey hen,” said the chairman to his mate. “He takes it out, he does. Blest if he won’t wear that chair out. If every one sat as him the price must go up to tuppence.”

If the chairman could have quoted Latin, he would have hurled Virgil’s “*Sedet eternumque sedebit*” at Harry’s head; but fortunately he could not, and so he only mocked at him and jeered at him in the vernacular. But Harry was as Gallio, “he cared for none of those things.” There he sat thinking on Edith, and the more he sat the more he thought.

However, there is one thing against which even love is not proof, and that is hunger. Love is such an exertion, it so altogether, as the saying is, takes it out of a man or woman—real love, mind you, none of your sham affection—that the body would be ground down by the soul were it not refreshed with food. If a man who is in love tells you he doesn’t eat, don’t believe him. He must eat if he is in love, or else he could not bear the strain which the heart or the head—for, as is well known, it is a disputed point as to which is the seat of the affections—

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throws upon the body. Lovers, we know, often fancy they can't eat, or won't eat. That is all a delusion. They deceive themselves like the wicked and other fools. We would be bound to tell a man in love by merely glancing at his weekly bills.

As for Harry Fortescue, about half-past three he felt very hungry. So, like an animal seeking its prey, he rose and left his chair. His spirit was willing still to sit idle and think of Edith, but his flesh was weak, and he felt he must eat something. The club was too far off; besides, there was his visit to Edith. Where should he go? To the grill-room at the South Kensington Museum? That, again, was too far. Then there was Gunter's temple of the arts—*center magister artium* being the only art cultivated, and very well cultivated, there. To Gunter's he accordingly went; and they gave him, on his demand for something to eat, asparagus soup and, we believe, a mutton chop and some patties; and then, feeling still very hungry, he had a Bath bun. That is enough, we hope, to prove how much he must have been in love. Fancy a man having still appetite left for a Bath bun after all that had gone before! Then he had a strawberry ice, and, having washed all this down with a pint of claret, he felt himself at charity with all the world,

and much more in love with Edith Price than he had been when he rose famishing from that chair in the Park. If any of you call him greedy, we shall quarrel with you. Harry Fortescue never had been greedy, and was not greedy then. He was in love, and when a man is really in love, if he doesn't get enough to eat he will die before he comes to a declaration. All prudent mothers, therefore, who wish to secure a very eligible young man for their daughters, should take care, if they see him at all hesitating or backward, to ask him often to luncheon and dinner, and see that he is very well fed. Ten chances to one he will then propose. In fact, a lover must be treated just as any other animal. If you wish your hens to lay early, you give them meat. It is a very simple rule, "Feed a lover, and you will find a husband." Starve him, and he will not have the heart to propose.

When he left Gunter's, and paid a young lady with close-cropped curls, who had been as good as gold to him, Harry Fortescue would have gone straight to Lupus Street and proposed, but the fear of the greengrocer kept him off.

"That wretch at the corner won't be at his tea yet," said Harry; so he strolled about, and as he passed through Belgrave Square he saw Amicia

drive past. He thought she might have stopped to speak to him; but as it was, she only gave him a quick bow and dashed on with a wild look of triumph. Little did he know what was passing in her mind, though, to a certain extent, she had guessed what was passing in his. You must, all of you, we think, do justice to the constancy of Amicia, and to the energy and address with which she conceived and carried out her plans. Her heart was set on Harry Fortescue, and she was resolved to have him if she could. Now she thought she had the game in her own hands.

“Let him try to take her to church next Sunday,” she said; “he’ll not find it so easy. I wonder if there’s a St. Barnabas at Blickling?”

Men in love are often stupid, and Harry was very stupid just then.

“She means something by that look,” he said. “But never mind. It will soon all be over. I shall soon be accepted by Edith.”

So he walked on and on in his fool’s paradise till it was nearly five o’clock. “He must be getting his tea now,” he said; and so he walked off to Lupus Street as fast as he could.



CHAPTER XV.

HARRY FORTESCUE PROPOSES AND IS REFUSED.

IF Harry Fortescue fancied he was going to elude the watchful eye of Mr. Leek, he was much mistaken. The greengrocer had already, as the penny-a-liners say, partaken of tea, and was standing at his own doorstep, flourishing like a summer cabbage after that invigorating beverage.

“There he goes, the ’orrid aristocrat,” he said to Mrs. Leek. “Now he’s going to find out how Miss Price liked them British Queens.”

“Is Miss Edith at home?” asked Harry Fortescue, who was now desperate, and ready to defy the greengrocer though he had as many eyes as Argus.

“Yes, sir, she is,” said Betsy, “and will be down directly. She’s just about her packing.”

“About her packing,” thought Harry. “What can she have to pack about? Oh, I daresay it’s Mary that they are sending off to school.”

So he waited till Edith came down to the dingy back drawing-room with a glow of pleasure on her face.

“Oh, Mr. Fortescue!” she cried rather than said, “I *am* so much obliged to you, and so is mamma.”

“For the strawberries, I suppose?” said Harry. “They were not much to be obliged for; but I am glad you liked them.”

“Strawberries!” said Edith. “I never heard of any strawberries, so I can’t thank you for them. It is for the situation that I am so grateful. I am sure you must have mentioned me to Lady Charity.”

“Situation! Lady Charity!” exclaimed Harry. “I know of no situation, and never spoke a word to Lady Charity about you.”

To tell the truth, Edith was as much mortified to hear that Harry had not got her the situation as Harry was at finding that she had got one. She had made up her mind once for all that he was to be to her a benefactor to whom she was to owe everything. Nor did she attach to the term any of that odious sense which to Harry’s mind it conveyed.

“Oh, Mr. Fortescue,” she said, “I am vexed to hear that I am not indebted for this too, as for so much else, to your kindness.”

“And I,” said Harry, “am more pained than I

can tell to hear that you have a hope of obtaining a situation."

"It is much more than a hope," said Edith; "it is the fulfilment of hope, expectation accomplished. I have got a very excellent situation as governess, down in Norfolk. It was offered to me this morning by Lady Charity, and I have accepted it, and I am going down to-morrow morning by the eleven o'clock train from Shoreditch Station."

Harry Fortescue could scarcely believe what he heard. It was a great blow to him; quite as unexpected as Mr. Blifill's death to that calculating gentleman in "Tom Jones." He turned pale, and was about as near fainting as Amicia had been when she heard the dreaded name Sonderling in Miss Markham's cottage. As it was, he did not quite faint, but faltered out—

"This is very sudden, Edith. We shall all miss you very much."

Since she had been a child, Harry Fortescue had never called her Edith, but still Edith's eyes were not yet opened—she had not yet tasted of Love's apple, and still walked in her Eden of innocence, looking upon Harry Fortescue as something divine and infinitely above her. So she answered, as Harry thought, in a very cold way—

“Yes, Mr. Fortescue, I know and feel all that. But, after all, you know it was a separation which must come one day or other. Mamma really bears it better than I could have hoped. And then consider the help I shall be to them. Why, only fancy, I shall have a salary of a hundred a year!”

She said this as if a hundred pounds a year represented all the gold in the treasure-house of Cræsus, and was surprised to find Harry still standing as she thought apathetically before her, quite unmoved by the astounding intelligence.

“What is a hundred a year?” said Harry, rather stupidly.

“Everything to me,” said Edith proudly, “though perhaps nothing to you, who are so rich, and have so many friends. At least, it will make me more independent, and remove some of the load of debt which your constant generosity has laid on us.”

“I do not wish it removed,” said Harry. “If I had my way I would pay off the debt after a fashion of my own.”

“And what is that fashion?” asked Edith very innocently. “I should so like to know.” Thus proving that, if love is blind, so also are very often those who are not in love.

“By offering you my hand,” said Harry, very quickly; “and then, as all your debts would be my debts, I should bear the burden all my life long with you.”

Then at last her eyes were opened, and she saw that Harry Fortescue was in love with her.

We are not at all sure that any woman, however young or however old, is displeased at an offer of marriage. We daresay, therefore, that Edith Price was gratified when she heard Harry's declaration. But Edith Price was not at all the woman to be “gratified” all at once into such affection as is implied by marriage, merely because a young man who had been very kind and generous to her and her family offered her his hand. We believe, in fact, in no such sudden conversions in love. There had been no time to sow the seed even of love. After that operation is over, it will germinate and flourish rapidly enough. Here was Harry Fortescue's affection for Edith Price only four days old, in which space of time it had shot up, as we have said, like a bamboo in the tropics. But if his ardent disposition could only arrive at a declaration in four days, do you not suppose that Edith Price required at least as long—that some little time must elapse before she could say

that she loved Harry Fortescue. Many people fancy that a handsome young man has only to throw himself before a girl and say, "I love you with all my heart and soul and strength," and she] will accept him on the spot. But this love or your life way is not commonly the way of women. They must be wooed and won. They will not be taken by storm, or carried off, like the Sabine women, by any noble young Roman of any period. It is beneath their dignity, and shocks their self-respect. Even if, before such an offer is made, they have abandoned the outworks to the dangerous enemy, they will retire as soon as they are so suddenly and, as it seems to them, so rudely summoned into the keep and citadel of their dignity, and thence defy the enemy till he has made his approaches and advances in due form. Nowadays, at least, few women, just as seldom as fortresses, are taken by storm. And if a young man with the best intentions is brutal or bearish enough to attempt an escalade, a thousand chances to one he will be beaten off and get the worst of it.

So it was with Edith Price. Though gratified, she was shocked and scared. Rather grieved, too, to find her benefactor, whom she had almost deified, descending in this vulgar way from that cloudy

Olympus to which she had raised him in her imaginations. From a god to a lover was, in her eyes, a step from the sublime to the ridiculous. She drew herself, therefore, up to her full height, and said, as though she were an empress, and heiress of a dozen crowns at least—

“Mr. Fortescue, I am amazed to hear such silly words from you.”

“Do you call the accents of love silly?” said Harry.

“The accents of love are not silly,” said Edith, “when he has any right to be heard. But you have no such right. Even to utter such accents, situated as we are, with a great gulf between us, which can never be bridged over, is an insult.”

“I did not mean to insult you,” said Harry sadly.

“I believe you,” said Edith; “but what you said sounded like a mockery and an insult. Why not remain as you are, our benefactor, the great object of our respect and esteem?”

“I cannot remain as I am,” said Harry. “If I cannot have your love, I will have none of your respect or esteem. ‘Benefactor!’ what an odious name!”

“It is not odious, and shall never be so to me,”

said Edith. "It means 'well-doer.'" And then she laid her hand on Harry's arm, and said softly, "It is better to do well than to do evil, Mr. Fortescue; and so do not throw me into fresh trouble by offering me something which I feel I can never accept."

Harry Fortescue was, as you all know, of a very generous nature. He felt that he had been too hasty, and was not the man to hurry any woman's cattle, least of all those of the girl he fondly loved.

"You must forgive me," he said. "I fear I was mad to suppose you could accept me all at once."

"Be sane, then," said Edith, "and be good, and let me leave London without embittering the few hours which still remain to me with my mother and Mary."

"I will be sane," said Harry; and then he shook Edith by the hand and departed, and she was left alone to continue her packing. There can be no doubt that his affection had shot up wonderfully. It remains to be seen whether that little grain of mustard-seed which had been shaken down from his goodly tree would take root in Edith's heart, spring up, and overshadow her. Who can tell? Remember only that a novelist is as a god: with him all things are possible.

“There he is again,” said Mr. Leek, as Harry Fortescue brushed past him in a desperate way. “He is in a ’urry, he is. Hoff to keep another appintment.” Then turning to the wife of his bosom, the portly Mrs. Leek, who might have been subdivided into little leeks for the whole principality of Wales on St. David’s day, he said, “The ’abits of the arystycracy is ’orrid, Jemima Anne. When shall we ever ’ave our regulars, and sit in Parlymint with our equils?”

“You may vell say ven,” said Mrs. Leek, whose sympathies were nearly as radical as her husband’s. “Them idlers like that young man are a caddling pack. They ought to dig in the market-gardins round the metropolice.”

“Do you think they’d grow good wegetables, Jemima Anne?” said Mr. Leek sententiously.

“I doubt it, but if ve ’ad the power ve’d make ’em try.”

“If they didn’t grow good grass,” said Mr. Leek, “I’d liever grow them myself, if so be I vos to eat ’em.”

From this it will be seen that Mr. Leek’s notion of liberty was that the working classes should take the places of their betters, and that while the old masters worked the old servants should consume the


fruit of their toil. But it will be seen that even his advanced politics saw a difficulty. When he feared the upper classes might not grow good asparagus, or, as he called it, "grass," he only re-echoed the opinion of the French cook, who, when a similar arrangement was suggested, declared that he could not accept it at all.

"I give my master very good dinners," he said; "but I must altogether decline to eat his dinners, he would dress them so badly."

If any one sees in the story of the French *chef* an additional reason against the communistic reconstruction of society, by which the bees should become drones and the drones bees, they are quite welcome to make all the use they can of it.

While Mr. Leek and his wife were settling the affairs of the nation, Harry Fortescue was striding along towards Mrs. Boffin's house. He saw nothing, heard nothing, and felt nothing except that Edith Price had refused him, and that he had been forced to confess she was quite right.

"I shall always love her," he said. "There's no woman in the world like her. As it is, it's all for the best that she should leave town. Perhaps she may not feel happy in Norfolk, and then she will return to town. In the meantime, it must never be



known that she has had an offer of marriage. It might do her harm."

With all that irony of love which even rejected lovers feel, he determined that he would tell no one what had passed. No, not even to Edward Vernon would he reveal a syllable of his attachment for Edith Price. If he found him at Mrs. Boffin's he would astonish him by saying in a casual way that Edith Price had got a situation, "and perhaps Edward—poor fellow, he is so deeply in love with Alice Carlton—will think that all this interest I have lately taken in Edith has been with a view to this very situation. Then my secret will be safe."

When Harry Fortescue reached Mrs. Boffin's, he saw Edward coming along the street. The fact was that Edward had been looking for him all the afternoon, and passed by Gunter's shop in search of him in the Park, while Harry was devouring that very good luncheon. So he had missed him, and, failing in his quest, he had settled himself down in a chair, and sat almost as long as Harry had done in the morning thinking of Alice Carlton and wondering if he should hear anything about her before he went to Ascot.

"So glad to see you, Harry," said Edward. "I was getting anxious about you."

“Anxious about what?” said Harry.

“You have been very strange these few days, Harry,” said Edward, tenderly; “so different, I was afraid you had something on your mind.”

“I have had something on my mind, but it was a secret, and I could not tell it even to you, Ned. It’s no secret now. Edith Price has got a very good situation as governess down in Norfolk, and she goes down to it to-morrow.”

“I am very glad to hear it,” said Edward, as he opened Mrs. Boffin’s door with his latchkey. “It will ease her mind to have something to do and to try to support the rest of the family.”

“I am afraid she will find it very uncongenial work,” said Harry—that deceitful Harry, who, you see, was already playing off some of those stratagems which are as fair in love as they are in war, only that in war they are against enemies, while in love they are played off on one’s best and truest friends.

“I don’t see that at all,” said Edward Vernon. “She told me last Sunday she thought she should like nothing so much as teaching.”

“Perhaps she mayn’t like it when she tries it,” said Harry.

By this time the two friends had reached Mrs.

Boffin's front drawing-room, and saw some letters on the table.

"Here is one, I declare, from Lady Carlton," said Edward, eagerly clutching it, and tearing it out of the envelope.

"Don't be in such a hurry, Ned," said Harry sadly. "I daresay it's all right."

But Edward Vernon paid no heed to him till he had read the letter through, and then he turned to Harry and asked—

"Did you say anything, Harry?"

"I said I supposed it would be all right," said Harry.

"It is all right," said Edward; "I knew it would be. Lady Carlton only reminds us that Lord Pennyroyal has asked Florry and Alice to Ascot, and that Lady Pennyroyal—the darling woman—hopes we will both go to Ouzelmere to luncheon between the races on Tuesday."

"Ouzelmere!" said Harry vaguely; "what's Ouzelmere?"

"Why, silly," said Edward, "that's of course the name of the house which the Pennyroyals have taken for the race week."

"Oh," said Harry, "I see;" his heart being back in Lupus Street already.

"This is really delightful," said Edward. "What fun we shall have!"

"What's delightful?" said Harry.

"Why, going to Ascot, of course," said Edward. "Only fancy, we shall meet Florry and Alice."

"Not to mention old Pennyroyal," said Harry. "However, all the same, I daresay it will be very nice—for those that like it."

"And won't you like it, Harry?" said Edward.

"I don't know," said Harry, knowing well enough all the time that he would not like it at all. "You must recollect that we are not going to stay with the Pennyroyals, but with Lady Charity and Lady Sweetapple at Heath Lodge."

"Very true," said Edward; "but then you know we shall see a great deal of Florry and Alice."

"I don't know that we shall," said Harry. "Races are such a perpetual bustle and hurry."

"At any rate we shall go to luncheon on Tuesday with the Pennyroyals," said Edward. "Here, you see, is the invitation."

"Who can tell?" said Harry dreamily. "You see we can't leave the ladies with whom we are staying to go off to luncheon with other people. It wouldn't be polite."

"Harry," said Edward, "you're enough to pro-

voke a saint with your 'I don't knows' and 'who can tells.' I do know and I can tell very well that we shall go to luncheon with the Pennyroyals on Tuesday. Of course they will ask the ladies to go with us."

"That's not very like old Pennyroyal," said Harry. "He will be afraid of being eaten out of house and home." Then brightening up all at once he said, "Come, Ned, I'll bet you a crown that we have a cold leg of mutton for luncheon at Ouzelmere."

"A boiled leg?" said Edward.

"No," said Harry, "I'll not bet that; it would be too horrid. I say a leg of mutton."

"Done," said Edward; "and, now you are more like your old form, let us go and dress for dinner at Mrs. Grimalkin's."





CHAPTER XVI.

HOW THEY ALL SPENT THE TIME BEFORE ASCOT.

WE are not about to dwell on that dinner at Mrs. Grimalkin's. Harry and Edward went and came away. It was like most of Mrs. Grimalkin's dinners, neither very good nor very bad. Harry Fortescue thought most of the company bores; but then, you know, he was not exactly in a state of mind to be a good judge. Edward afterwards said it was amusing, and on going away he told Mrs. Grimalkin that he had enjoyed himself very much. But then Edward was ready to look at all things in a rosy light after that letter from Lady Carlton.

The reader will probably not be disappointed at hearing nothing more of Mrs. Grimalkin's dinner. We have all of us in our lives, be they long or short, had more than enough of the great house of Tabbicat. Perhaps he will be more sorry not to

hear anything of Edith Price's departure for Norfolk. After that interview Harry Fortescue could not venture to call at No. —, Lupus Street; and, in fact, we should know little as to how poor Edith parted from Mary and her mother, were it not that Lady Charity was so anxious to see the new governess packed off safely to the station, that she sent her maid to take her to Shoreditch, and along with her went Mrs. Crump, who, when she came back, told her mistress that the "poor thing" lived in a wretched lodging, and that Mrs. Nicholson told her poor Mrs. Price was took ill at the notion of Miss Edith's going. "She can't abear it," she said, "for Miss Edith is the life of the family."

"But she went all the same, Crump, I hope?" said Amicia.

"Oh yes, my lady; Mrs. Frazer—that's Lady Charity's maid—and me went with her in a cab to the station, and took her ticket and put her into the train, and told the guard—a very 'andsome young man with black whiskers, my lady—to look after her; and then she bowed to us and thanked us out of the window, like a real lady, and the train started, and we saw no more of her."

"Then she has gone, Crump?" said Lady Sweet-apple, with a sigh of relief.

“Yes, my lady, gone, and ’alfway to Norwich by this time.”

This is all we shall tell you about Edith’s journey. Nor shall we say much about what happened on the remaining days of the week. There lay the seeds of hope and hate in all those lovers’ hearts, growing and springing in various ways, till they all went down to Ascot on Monday. If we say that Harry and Edward were as lazy as usual we shall not be far wrong. They were both lost in the idleness of love, and passed the days in dreaming of Alice and Edith. Amicia and Lady Charity were full of preparations for the races, and it was not the fault of the former if she were not gorgeously arrayed at Ascot. Harry went to see her on the Saturday, the 11th of June, but he took Edward Vernon with him as a protection. They found Mrs. Grimalkin there, so there could be no scandal as to their visit. The same day they met Count Pantouffles walking along Piccadilly. He bowed his very best to them, and hoped he might see them at the races. After that they went into the Row, and there they saw sitting side by side the gallant Colonel Barker and his faithful wife. When they asked him if he were going to Ascot, he replied he would not go there for a great deal. Mrs. Barker hated races, and so

he never went to them. You see what a good and faithful husband Colonel Barker was, and what a warning he is to all men always to do what their wives wish.

"The Marjorams will be there, though, Jerry," said Mrs. Barker; "for Mrs. Marjoram told me the other day that Lady Pennyroyal insisted on their staying for the week at Ouzelmere."

"I don't like Mrs. Marjoram," said Harry; "but I think old Marjoram a splendid fellow."

"He has a good deal to bear," said Mrs. Barker; "but for all that he's very fond of Mrs. Marjoram."

"So was Job of his first wife," said Harry.

"Oh, Mr. Fortescue, don't be so spiteful," said Mrs. Barker; whereat the colonel laughed.

"Jerry, dear," said Mrs. Barker, "we must get home to dinner, or the fish will be spoilt."

"By all means let us go, my dear," said Colonel Barker. And so, though it was only a little after five, the constant couple waddled off like a pair of ducks across the Park to Tyburnia.

"There they go, Harry," said Edward—"the most loving pair in England."

"Yes," said Harry in a melancholy voice. "When you are married to Alice Carlton, mind you are always as good to her as Colonel Barker is to his wife."

“And you, when you are married to Floŕy——”

But before Edward could end his sentence, Harry stopped him.

“Don’t deceive yourself, Ned ; I shall never be married to Floŕy Carlton.”

“Faint heart never won fair lady,” said Edward, who still went on in his stupid way, fancying that because Floŕy was in love with Harry, Harry must be in love with her.

“My heart is not faint,” said Harry, “and I do not mean to try to win her.”

“I don’t believe you,” said Edward.

So they went on at cross purposes ; and when they had sat long enough, they went and dined at the club. They had now got so much in the way of going to bed early, that Mrs. Boffin ceased to wonder at it. So that they did not rise early it did not matter ; but to go to bed early and to rise early was, she said, as bad as burning the candle at both ends.

We forgot to say that Edward Vernon answered Lady Carlton’s letter as soon as he received it, and in his reply he said that nothing would give him and Harry Fortescue greater pleasure than to see the young ladies again. It would not be their fault if they did not come to luncheon at Ouzelmere on Tuesday, but they were to a certain extent depen-

dent on the movements of Lady Charity, with whom they would be staying for the race week.

When Lady Carlton communicated the contents of this epistle to her daughters, Alice Carlton thought it all that could be wished, but Florry was not nearly so well satisfied. What she said to her mother was, "I call that a very cold letter, mamma;" but when she got up to the schoolroom with Alice she was much less measured in her language.

"How can you say you are pleased, Alice, with such a letter? Why, Harry Fortescue's name is only mentioned once in it!"

"Darling Florry," said Alice, "why complain? Edward's name is not mentioned at all till the signature at the very end."

"Yes; but then he wrote it himself," said Florry. "Of course, Edward could not speak about himself, but he might have said a little more of Harry, and Harry," she added sorrowfully, "might have sent me a message."

"How could he send you a message, Florry? You know it would not have been right. Young men don't send messages to young ladies—it's not proper."

"I know it is not," said Florry; "but I daresay widows do. I wonder, now, how many times that

nasty woman has seen Harry Fortescue since she has been in town."

"Now, do not be so jealous, Florry," said Alice. "How do you know he has seen her at all?"

"I am sure he has," said Florry. "Not that he's at all likely to marry her; he has far too good taste. And then, there's that Edith Price. Between the two, I can't rest at night."

"Why don't you trust in Harry as I trust in Edward?" said Alice.

"Because it's not in my nature," said Florry, "and because Harry Fortescue is far less easy to manage than Edward Vernon."

"He is, indeed, and I am glad of it," said Alice; "but keep up your spirits, darling, and rely on seeing him at Ascot."

So the sisters consoled each other up-stairs, while Sir Thomas and Lady Carlton discussed the affair down-stairs, and by Sunday morning had quite made up their minds that one daughter should marry Harry Fortescue and the other Edward, if these young men would only behave properly and ask prettily for them at Ascot.

That Sunday, the 12th of June, 1870, was one of longing and hope for all the characters in our book. When Amicia woke up, the first thing she thought

of was, "One day more, and then I shall meet him at Ascot. I have banished Edith Price from London, and as for Florry Carlton, I defy her. He must and shall be mine!"

Harry Fortescue when he woke said, "One day more to Ascot, and then the horrid week will be soon over. I wonder how my Edith"—he had actually the audacity to call the girl who had rejected him "my"—"gets on with the Blicklings, and how long it will be before I see her again." Edward Vernon was intent on Alice, saying little and thinking much. After breakfast he said, "Shall we go to St. Barnabas, Harry?"

"Of course we will," said Harry; "I wouldn't miss going there for anything." And when they set out, if Edward Vernon had not all the eyes of his heart turned on High Beech, he might have seen how cunningly Harry Fortescue walked through the very same streets to St. Barnabas, and even tried to put his feet on the very flagstones on which Edith had walked the Sunday before. It was very silly, but very natural for a young man in love. The very dust beneath her feet was life to him. In the church he sat on the same seat as he had filled the Sunday before, and all through the service he stared at the seat where Edith had sat. It mattered

nothing that it was now filled with a fat old lady, as like to Edith as a turtle is to a turtle-dove; but was it not the same seat—the shrine which his divinity had visited? All this passed under Edward's eyes, yet he never noticed it. He, too, was in love, and reft of outward sense. Florry and Alice walked twice to church, side by side, talking and thinking of Harry and Edward, and when afternoon church was over they went down to the river and looked at the kingfisher, still hard at work to feed himself and his young. But the only pleasure they took in him or his bright plumage and unerring eye, was that it was the same kingfisher on which Harry and Edward had looked. It was so nice to look at him and think of those absent ones. And so the weary, sultry Sunday passed away, and night came, and dew fell, and the lovers in town and country thought of those that were not with them, but whom they were soon to meet. All but poor Harry, who went on resolutely loving Edith Price, and his love increasing in stature and in Harry's favour every hour, and refusing to listen to the seductions of Amicia or the constancy of Florry Carlton.

“I am quite ready, dear Lady Charity,” said Amicia, as they came back from St. Paul's, Knights-bridge, that Sunday afternoon. “My new dresses

are charming, and if it doesn't rain at Ascot my triumph will be complete."

"You deserve to win, you are so confident," said Lady Charity. "I am sure I wish you all success."

"I am sure I shall succeed," said Amicia, as she went in at No. —, Lowndes Street.

"Now, Mr. Marjoram," said Mrs. Marjoram, after family prayers on Sunday, "there is one thing that I especially desire. Do not let me see you flirting with any of the ladies we may meet at Ascot. Races, you know, are my aversion, and I only go there under a protest to please you and Lady Pennyroyal. But you will add much to the disgust with which I go to this profane and worldly gathering of the priests of Baal if you indulge in any of your usual exhibitions of bad taste. I never go out with you that you do not cover me with disgrace, and I desire that on this occasion I may be spared the repetition of any such indignities."

"But, my dear," said the much-enduring Marjoram, "when did you ever see me flirt with any one? And as for going to Ascot to please me, I declare I thought I was going to please you. I know I can only do so with great inconvenience in my business."

"Mr. Marjoram," said Mrs. Marjoram, "pray

spare me these painful altercations. You say you never flirt. Let the recollection of Miss Markham and my outraged feelings suffice to stop your mouth. As for going to Ascot, I can only repeat that I go there to please you. With my blighted heart and blasted affections, I really care not whither I go on earth."

"My dear," said Mr. Marjoram, "pray calm your feelings. You will injure your health."

"Cease your remonstrances," said the remorseless Mrs. Marjoram; "they are wasted on me. The heart knoweth its own bitterness."

"Yes," said Mr. Marjoram, driven to desperation, "and the ass his master's crib." And then, in some fear lest Mrs. Marjoram should go off into hysterics at his piecing together, or what she would call his "interpolation of Holy Writ," he seized his bedroom-candlestick and ran up-stairs to bed.

Mrs. Marjoram looked after him for a moment or two in amazement.

"What can he have been doing?" she cried. "Has he been smoking another cigar, or has that wicked, designing woman, Miss Markham, been writing him letters behind my back?"

Saying which she too ran off to bed; and all we

can say is, that if Mr. Marjoram did not catch it after Mrs. Marjoram went up to bed, the servants next morning belied their mistress when they met at breakfast, and had a good gossip before morning prayers.





CHAPTER XVII.

HOW HARRY AND EDWARD WENT TO ASCOT.

AT last the wished-for morrow." Harry and Edward were to meet Lady Charity and Amicia at the Waterloo Station. They were to go down to Heath Lodge by the 2.5 train, so that they might settle themselves at Ascot in the afternoon in good time for the races on Tuesday. Edward Vernon was all impatience, and tried to get Harry to the station a quarter of an hour before their time. But Harry dawdled and lingered, and, if he could have had his way, would have run off to admire Lupus Street once more before he started; he even wanted to drive to the Vauxhall Station, because then they would have to cross Lupus Street, but Edward would not hear of it. At last, however, they reached the Waterloo Station, where the clock of St. Sapphira's Church pointed at ten minutes past nine, as it has invariably pointed for the last ten years. They had only five minutes to spare

when they took their tickets, and on the platform they found the ladies and their maids anxiously expecting them.

"I thought you were never coming," said Amicia reproachfully, to Harry.

"In this world one ought never to hurry one's self or others," said Harry.

"We had better take our seats," said Edward, "or we shall be left behind after all."

So they took their seats, and had the carriage to themselves all the way down. Whether this freedom from strangers with forward manners was due to want of traffic or to half-a-crown which Harry had given to the guard, we decline to say.

The trains to Ascot, it is matter of railway history, are not fast. They are not at all like some of the young ladies of the present day, "velocious," as we have heard a Yankee say. And here we may remark that, as a general rule, life would be much more tolerable, at least for fathers, if the trains were faster and the daughters slower in this generation. But the trains to Ascot are not fast. They are virtuous, respectable locomotives, doing their twenty miles an hour with extreme regularity. Even if they sometimes dash off as far as Staines at something like speed, they lose it all again before you

get to Ascot; for after Staines the train becomes a regular crawler. They are all drawn by engines called "the Sloth," or "the Snail," or "the Tortoise." They stop five minutes at every station; and if any station were left out or passed by, it would raise such a question of precedence between it and all the other stations as would last for years before it was settled.

So the 2.5 train, which bore Amicia and her followers to Ascot, crawled and crept along for about an hour and a half, and then it stopped at Ascot Station. The good Lady Charity had sent her carriage down on Saturday, and there it was waiting for them at the station, which for a week once in the year is converted from one of the quietest into the busiest station in England.

"How far is it to Heath Lodge?" asked Amicia of the polite station-master.

"About half a mile up the hill," was the reply.

Then, leaving the maids and footmen to look after their baggage, they drove off for Heath Lodge.

You all of you, of course, remember how hot it was at Ascot races of 1870; and certainly as they drove up the hill the sun beat down on them with tropical heat.

"How dusty the roads are!" said Edward, as if it

was at all likely they could be anything else after the last year's drought.

"They'll be much more cut up to-morrow and Thursday," said Harry, looking idly down on the gravelly ride.

As her companions were so dull, Amicia thought it lucky that Heath Lodge was only half a mile from the station. It was less than half a mile in reality; and as soon as the horses had breasted the hill they were not long in reaching the house.

"I wonder what the house is like," said Lady Charity. "I only took it by description. Perhaps it will turn out to be like buying a pig in a poke."

"I think," said Harry, brightening up, "it can't be so bad as that. If I recollect, there was no pig after all in the poke. There must be a house called Heath Lodge, at any rate."

"We shall soon see," said Amicia, as they drove through the lodge-gate.

Of course you will say that if there is a lodge, and a very pretty one, as this was, there must be a house to correspond. But if you say this you may be quite wrong. A pretty lodge may be only a bait thrown out to tempt people to look at, and perhaps to take, a bad house. Nay, is there not the sad case of that Irish peer who spent eighty thousand pounds

on his lodge and his gate, and never got so far as building his house at all. He was ruined before he got to his house, and when he died he left his demesne, as they call it in Ireland, with a magnificent lodge and gate, and no house.

“Well, but what sort of a house was Heath Lodge?” It was a mere apology for a house, and it would have been hard to say which it most resembled, a lean-to, a barn, or a shed. It had a beautiful lodge and two entrances, good stables, and a magnificent position on the ridge overlooking the wild heath for miles and miles. Like madmen and fools it only lacked one thing, and that thing was itself. It was a charity to call it a house; and, though charity covers a deal of sin, it was hard even for charity to call Heath Lodge a house.

“How lovely!” said Amicia, as the carriage drove through the stately trees, and she inhaled the balmy fragrance of the firs. “How lovely!” and then before the words were well out of her mouth, the carriage stopped at what charity also called the hall-door.

Heath Lodge was a long low erection, pierced with apertures here and there called windows, one of which was dignified as the hall-door, and cut down to the ground. When you got inside you saw the

hall was no hall at all, but only a slice of the erection cut off in the middle. On either side of this slice you entered into other slices, and out of them again into other slices all of the same size. Then the erection turned the corner at each end, and there was another slice tacked on as a return, thus making two little wings. Behind in the centre was a glass shed over what was called a kitchen, and from the hall led a steep, ladder-like, straight, narrow staircase to the bedrooms above, which were all arranged on the same plan as the slices below. Over these bedrooms was the roof; and it was very lucky there was nothing more, because the erection would have certainly got topheavy and tumbled down.

The feature of Heath Lodge was the verandah, which ran round the front and the wings, and we verily believe kept the whole erection upright. If Heath Lodge had not had that surgical bandage it must have fallen down, it was such a cripple. When we add that, like so many of our noble abbeys, it had no foundations; that there were no cellars, and the wine was hidden like the early Christians in holes and corners of the house; that there was a smell of dry-rot as soon as the windows were closed; and that, as you lay in bed on the lovely June morning, you could see the sun shining down the short, broad

chimney—you will perceive that, after all, hiring Heath Lodge even for a week was rather like buying a pig in a poke.

Amicia and her friends had not been five minutes in Heath Lodge before they had run over all the ground-floor. Then she and Lady Charity went up the ladder to see what the bedrooms were like. When Harry was left with Edward the latter said—

“What a charming house out of doors, Harry, and what a doghole inside!”

“That’s because you don’t understand architecture, Ned. I can tell you all about it. Heath Lodge was built by a sporting admiral in George IV.’s time—not our dear old handicapping admiral, but a real old salt. So when he came to build this ‘box,’ as he called it, he planned it on the model of his old ship the *Renown*, a fine old two-decker of those days; and if he could have had his way he would have had as many windows in his house as the old ship had guns, but as he could not have so many, he built on what Mr. Sheepskin calls the *cy-pres* principle. Don’t you see all the rooms are cabins; the kitchen is the cockpit; we are now on the main-deck, and that ladder reaches up to the spar-deck and the quarter-deck. These windows at each end are for his stern-chasers and bow-chasers.

When he got out on the roof and surveyed the country, he felt himself on his quarter-deck with his glass in his hand."

This was such a long speech for Harry now to make, that Edward Vernon looked on it as a sign of returning animation.

"All very true, Harry," he said; "but what's the verandah like?"

"How silly you are!" said Harry. "Don't you see that when the gallant admiral built Heath Lodge he fancied that he had brought the *Renown* into port, and so he threw this verandah round her to show that she was in dry dock."

"Oh, I see," said Edward; and after this short lucid interval they both relapsed into love, and began to think of Edith and Alice.

As soon as Lady Sweetapple and Lady Charity had mounted the ladder, they were followed by Lady Charity's cook, who wanted them to come down at once and look at "her" kitchen.

"Never a hotplate nor a gas stove, my lady. Nothing to cook with, and such a draught. One might as well cook out of doors."

"No great hardship in this lovely weather," said her mistress. "You must make the best of it, Mrs. Cullender. It's only for a week, you

know. We must live as we can, and not be particular."

So Mrs. Cullender was despatched down the ladder quicker than she came, and next it was the turn of the maids.

"Oh, my lady," cried Mrs. Crump, "never a drop of 'ot water laid on, and not so much cold water either, in the whole 'ouse."

"Just as I thought would be the case," said Amicia, coldly. "You will have to work hard, Crump, for this week at least. Who wants hot water in this weather? Take some of the cold out and let it stand in the sun—it will soon get warm. This week we must all rough it."

"Rough it, indeed, my lady!" persisted Mrs. Crump. "We shall all cry out rough it when the 'ard water turns all our complexions into goose-skins."

"Don't be a goose yourself, Crump," said Amicia. "Go away and make the best of it."

Amicia was determined not to be put out by these small troubles.

Then there was a great consultation as to how the berths in the cabins up-stairs were to be filled. At last it was settled that Harry and Edward should have the two sternmost cabins, and Amicia and Lady

Charity those in the bow of the *Renown*. In the waist of the ship Mrs. Crump and Mrs. Frazer were placed, and in rooms on either side of them came the other maids. What became of the men-servants no one knew. They were all under the leadership of Lady Charity's old butler, who had been with her many years—a man who never made a complaint, thought nothing domestic beneath his care, and would have found a roof over your head, ay, and beds under it besides, even in the deserts of Arabia. He never interfered with the maids, he said. "Maids were like fillies"—he was, as you see, rather of a sporting turn—"so uncertain, it was never safe to speculate on what they might do. Mrs. Frazer or my lady might manage them." But for the men he could answer, and he did answer for them at Heath Lodge. There they always were, respectful and attentive. Whether they slept up trees like gorillas, or underground like field-mice and moles, no one could tell. Perhaps they slept in a tent; perhaps they never went to bed at all. There they were by day; at bed-time they vanished, only to return next morning at breakfast. A good butler, like a great general, is never so truly good and great as in such a house as Heath Lodge at Ascot Races.

"You will see," said Lady Charity to Amicia, as

they climbed down the ladder holding by the hand-rail, "we shall be very comfortable here."

"But shall I be happy?" said Amicia.

"Of course you will, my dear; of course you will. And now let us look after our young men."

"They can't be far off," said Amicia. But they were nowhere to be found in the house.

"It's rather stuffy here," said Harry to Edward while the ladies were up-stairs; "let us get out into the open air, and sit under a tree and have a weed."

"Just what I think," said Edward. "That just suits my complaint."

So they went out and looked down across the low ground near the Ascot station, away over wide heather towards the Hampshire hills. I am not sure that they did not see the Hind's Head.

Nor was it long before the ladies joined them; and then they walked about the beautiful grounds and admired the site.

"What a splendid position for a house!" said Harry.

"Yes," said Amicia; "and with such a house on it! Heath Lodge does not remind me of what Gustavus Adolphus said of the Munich of his day, that it was a golden saddle on a donkey's

back, for it is a donkey's pannier on a thoroughbred horse."

"Pray don't talk of thoroughbred horses till tomorrow. We shall have quite enough of them when the races begin," said Harry with great brutality. "But it is a wretched house."

"What shall we do?" said Lady Charity, changing the conversation. "Oh, I know. We will wait till the sun has gone down a little, and then we'll take a drive in the cool of the evening to Swinley, and come back and dine at nine."

"That will be charming," said Amicia; "and then we can have a nice walk under the old oaks at Swinley."

"Anything you like," said Lady Charity. "We are here to enjoy ourselves, you know."

"I am quite ready," said Harry. "Anything for a quiet life. I am willing to sit here or to go there. Don't you think it delightful to sit under the shade of this tulip-tree and think of nothing?"

Thinking of nothing, the story-teller! when his heart was far away, among the fens and "broads" of Norfolk, near that prosaic King's Lynn.

"We might take a little turn about these grounds

first," said Amicia. "It will be all under the shade. Come along."

The young men rose, and the four walked slowly down the brow of the hill, through winding walks cut through chesnut and birch and Scotch fir, and as they went they admired the choice trees and plants which the worthy admiral had planted.

"There's an *Araucaria*," cried Lady Charity, in delight, "that rivals the one at Dropmore! It must be forty feet high. And do just look at those *Deodaras* and *Wellingtonias*. They're younger trees, for they were not introduced so soon; but they are noble trees, and especially that pair of *Wellingtonias* on the lawn. Did you ever see such stout, sturdy trees?"

Dear Lady Charity was an enthusiast on trees, and she would have run on through all the varieties of *Pinus* and *Abies*. Her conversation would have been a perfect wood of *Douglas* and *Nobilis* and *Pinsapos*. In fact, it would have become so thick of *Cryptomerias* and *Thujas* and cypresses, that, as Mr. Sonderling would have said, you could not see the wood for the trees. But Amicia, as you well know, had not proposed to stroll through the grounds to listen to a lecture on arboriculture from Lady Charity. Without replying, therefore, and

responding to her friend's rapture, she let Mr. Edward Vernon walk on, while she fell back with Harry Fortescue. Perhaps, if Harry had been less in love with Edith Price, he would have run away; but his rejection had made him desperate, he did not care much what befell him, so that he was allowed to worship his divinity in his own way. He remained, therefore, like a lamb led by a string; and all the while Amicia thought that her hour was come, and that at last she was leading Harry Fortescue about as she pleased.

"It is a pity he is so shy," she said to herself. "I must try to rouse him." Then she said out loud—

"You do not seem happy, Mr. Fortescue." She would have called him "Harry" if she had dared, but she did not dare.

"I am not happy," said Harry, shortly.

"I am so sorry for that," she said. "Can I do anything to make you happier, Mr. Fortescue?"

"I am afraid not," said Harry.

"Why are you afraid?" said Amicia, as impetuously as Florry Carlton might have answered, for she fancied now was her time, before Florry arrived on the scene. As for Edith Price, she had disposed of her for ever, she thought; added to which,

she always fell back on the reflection, "He has too much taste to marry a governess, however good-looking she may be."

"I am afraid of everything," said Harry; "of you, and," he added, "of the whole world."

"That is very silly, Mr. Fortescue," said Amicia. "Why be afraid of me, who am so little, and of the whole world, which is so great? Will you take my advice if I give it?"

"I can't take any advice till I hear what it is," said Harry, with a caution which would have done credit to Prometheus himself.

"Would you like to hear it?"

"Yes," said Harry.

"It is this," said Amicia, in her sweetest of all sweet voices: "Make your choice like a man, once for all. Be afraid of the whole world, but do not be afraid of me. You see," she said, sinking her voice almost to a whisper, "I wish you to make your choice between me and all the world, and to give the preference to me."

"I have no choice to make," said Harry sadly; "I do not know my own mind."

"Then why not let one who knows you so well as I do make it for you? You can trust me."

“I know not whom to trust,” said Harry, in a still more melancholy manner.

Amicia was just going to say, “Then pray trust in me as I trust in you,” when they turned a little in the road and came upon that provoking pair in front, who had got tired, and had sat down on a bench.

Had Amicia been a female tyrant, a Semiramis, a Tomyris, or Athaliah, of the olden time, she would have killed Lady Charity and Edward Vernon on the spot for thwarting her wishes ; she would have killed them both for spite, and then for love have erected a splendid monument to their memory. What right had they to sit there, just at that most critical moment of her destiny ? She had, in her own imagination, nearly brought her horse to the water, and, more than that, he was just about to drink, and here they stood in the way, not like angels but fiends, and troubled the water, and he was scared and would not drink. But as she was not a fine old female tyrant, and as her desires were bridled by laws and civilisation, and especially by want of power to work her will, she had to bear it, and to pout and say—

“Why, I thought you had been half a mile farther on, admiring the trees.”

“We thought we could admire them as well sitting as standing,” said Edward; “and so, as Lady Charity felt tired, I proposed to her to sit down. It was all my fault.”

After that they climbed up the hill again, and Amicia went up the steep ladder as soon as they re-entered the house, without uttering another word, she was so put out. She threw herself into a chair and burst into tears. “How unfortunate it was, and how stupid of them to sit there! It was not at all right.”

“Right!” As if a woman ought to speak of rights who had so accepted the modern mode of thinking about women and what they may do or not do, as to make what was the next thing to an offer, if it were not actually an offer, to a backward young man, of whom she was particularly fond. But, then, Amicia was a widow.





CHAPTER XVIII.

HOW THEY DROVE TO SWINLEY AND MET THE PENNYROYALS.

WHILE all this was happening at Ascot, Lord and Lady Pennyroyal were slowly making their way across country to Ascot from Farthinghoe Castle. Florry and Alice Carlton had driven over in the morning from High Beech, and, after luncheon, the whole party started for Ouzel-mere. We have not told you where High Beech was, and we do not mean to tell you. It's a shocking thing to lay bare the abodes as well as the hearts of men and women. No doubt, when this book is as famous as it deserves to be, tourists from the manufacturing districts, as well as our Transatlantic cousins, will make many a journey from London to see where the Carltons and the Pennyroyals lived. You will find more manufacturers asking for High Beech, and more Americans seeking for Farthinghoe Castle; for the men of Manchester

are, as is well known, no tuft-hunters, whereas most Americans fall down and worship a real live peer for the very novelty of the thing. But, so far as we are concerned, the privacy of the houses of Marjoram and Carlton shall be respected. Nothing shall induce us to reveal exactly where their estates lie.

You must be content, therefore, to know that both places were somewhere in Surrey, and that from Farthinghoe Castle you had to cut across country to Ascot.

In that weather it was not very easy work for the horses, though the distance was not more than twenty miles, and a pair of horses had been sent on to change half-way. On came the Pennyroyal carriage, with its four insides and its footman and coachman on the box, at the rate of seven miles an hour, by Sandhurst, all through the balmy, breezy, heathy country round Bagshot. The ladies were full of delight at the beauty of the fir woods and the picturesque nature of the country; and when they reached Swinley, and its oaks and beeches and limes and firs, at half-past seven, they were absolutely enchanted, as Lady Pennyroyal said.

Even Lord Pennyroyal enjoyed it in his way. As an agriculturist, he was not very fond of heath

and Bagshot sand ; he very much doubted whether his new hobby, Silesian sugar-beet, would thrive on such soil. The firs and ferns and heather were wasted on him ; his nostrils did not rejoice in the fragrance of the pine woods. But when they reached Swinley, where a great pocket of clay crops out at the edge of the Bagshot sand, he too was delighted ; but not as the ladies, and his joy was not pure as theirs, but mingled with regret.

“ Oh ! ” he said ; “ where such big trees grow, the soil must be good. There’s clay here, I’ll bet a penny.”

You see he was ready to stake two out of the four syllables which formed his name to back his opinion. What can a man stake more than half his name ? It was like the kings of old offering half of their kingdom to the man who could save their daughters from the dragon ; and yet, in Lord Pennyroyal’s case, it was only a penny.

“ Yes,” he said, “ there’s clay, and good clay, here, I’ll bet a penny.”

Then, as no one accepted the bet, he proceeded with his regrets.

“ What a waste of fine soil in keeping up these rotten old oaks ! I’d cut them all down if they were mine, sell the bark, grub up the roots for fire-

wood, plough up the land, and sow it with sugar-beet. What a crop it would bear!"

Rotten old oaks indeed! This was the irreverent way in which he spoke of those giants of the forest, those fine, gouty old fellows who stood all around him, as venerable as our grandfathers with their poor old feet swathed in flannel and limping about in list shoes. They were trees, every one of whom was an aristocrat of the forest. They had stood there long before the Conquest. And yet here was a peer, who represented a family of the same date, proposing to cut them down and supply their place with Silesian sugar-beet!

"I would do nothing of the sort," said Lady Pennyroyal. "I would leave it all just as it is. Nothing can be more beautiful than these oaks and beeches and firs and ferns and thorns."

"So would I, and I," said Florry and Alice in one breath.

"It is calculated," said Lord Pennyroyal, "that there are many thousands of acres of waste land in England. Fancy what they would produce if they were all broken up and sold and sown with sugar-beet!"

"I wouldn't sacrifice these oaks for all the sugar in the world," said Florry.

“I hope, if it produced anything, it would produce a revolution,” said Alice, “against the government that were such a set of Goths.”

“There’s the New Forest——” said Lord Pennyroyal.

“And I hope it will continue,” said Lady Pennyroyal.

“It is always impossible to argue with women,” said Lord Pennyroyal. “They are utterly ignorant of political economy.”

“Long may they remain so,” said Florry Carlton. “In this respect may they continue as wild and uncultivated as Bagshot Heath, Swinley Park, or the New Forest.”

“And these rabbits,” said Lord Pennyroyal—“look at the number of these pests of the farmer.” And as he said this, he pointed with his stick at the swarms of his enemies, which frisked and bobbed about in all directions.

“Pretty little creatures,” said Lady Pennyroyal, “how much they add to the charm of the landscape! a rabbit is such a really wild animal.”

“There they go, there they go,” cried Alice, laughing in glee to see them scuttle about on all sides.

It was very fortunate for those three ladies that

Lord Pennyroyal never swore; he was far too well-bred to do such a thing. But if he had ever sworn, it would have been then at his hereditary enemy the "irrepressible" rabbit, as he has been rightly called. But though he felt it beneath him to swear, it was his bounden duty to protest as solemnly as possible against the common foe.

"Rabbits," he said, with great severity—"rabbits will be the ruin of this favoured land. It should be the first duty of the government to extirpate them. There should be public coney-catchers, whose sole business, or rather duty, it should be to exterminate them. If it were necessary I would suppress the Master of the Buckhounds and establish a new dignity, 'The Queen's Own Coney-catcher.' He should wear a mantle of rabbit-skin, and——"

"Be free of every burrow in the kingdom," said Florry, interrupting him.

"My dear Miss Carlton," said Lord Pennyroyal, "don't jest on such a serious subject. Think of all the swedes and mangold and corn and grass, not to mention this new source of industry, Silesian sugar-beet, which these little wretches have destroyed and will destroy. Whole families have been ruined by their ravages, and wide regions depopulated in Australia and elsewhere by their inroads. Unless

they are checked the day will come when our rabbits will consume all our substance, and literally eat us out of house and home."

"Why can't we kill them?" said Alice, rather aghast.

"Oh, why?" said Lord Pennyroyal sadly. "The only reason, I suppose, is because we think them so insignificant. They are so little and we so big. Do you think England would tolerate it if thirty thousand mammoths were suddenly thrown upon our shores, or twenty thousand gorillas? No; in a month there would not be one of them left. Why? Because we are so small and they so big. We should raise the country in a body, call out the yeomanry, ride them down, hunt them down, and shoot and trap them, and, as I have said, in a month there would not be a mammoth or a gorilla left."

Here Lord Pennyroyal paused for breath, and they had just dipped down the hill beyond the old Deer Paddock in Swinley where the limes stand, and were looking down on the gigantic oaks below. No doubt he would have gone on in his crusade against the detested rabbit, but he was prevented.

The quick eye of Florry saw something among the trees, and she knew that something at a glance.

"There is a carriage down there following the

road," she said, "and among the trees are a party of four — two ladies and two gentlemen. And," she went on, "the two men are Harry Fortescue and Edward Vernon, and one of the ladies is Lady Sweetapple, the other lady I do not know."

"Of course we shall stop and speak to them," said Alice, with an imploring look to Lady Pennyroyal, who at once understood her desire and consented.

"A little walk will do us all good," she said. "The carriage can follow along the road and pick us up when we want it."

In a moment Florry and Alice had jumped out, and it must be confessed that Alice waved her parasol in the hope that Edward Vernon would see it. You must all forgive her, for it was in a forest far away from town, and she was young and in love.

"There is some one up there," said Edward to Harry. "See, she is waving her parasol;" and in a moment he had recognised Alice, and was running up the hill like a mad thing.

It was fortunate also that it is not the fashion for ladies to swear, or else Amicia would have sworn then, just as Lord Pennyroyal would have sworn shortly before. Would you believe it, just as she

was leading Harry Fortescue away under the huge oaks and beeches, and was going to have him all to herself, that provoking carriage full of her enemies arrived, and as she looked up she saw Edward Vernon warmly shaking hands with Alice Carlton, and Florry standing by her side and calling out, "How do you do, Mr. Fortescue?"

It would have fared as ill with Florry then as with Lady Charity two hours before had Amicia been a tyrant; only in Florry's case we do not think that Amicia would ever have repented of her deed and raised a monument to her memory.

But Amicia was a child of her time, bound by the laws of society. She could not cut even in Swinley Park the daughters of the woman with whom she had been very glad to stay the week before. There was no help for it; she, too, had to climb the hill, to present Lady Charity to Lady Pennyroyal and the Carltons, to talk of the weather and the beauty of the woods, and to accept a proposal that they should all walk towards Ascot together while the carriages followed. In a word, she had to do, as we most of us have to do every day of our lives, just what she most detested. Only, fortunately for us, we are not all of us every day expecting an offer either from a young gentleman, or, better still, from a

young lady, and so we do not take what is unpleasant so much to heart as she did.

Of course Alice Carlton was very happy, and so was Florry, and so was Edward Vernon. Harry Fortescue was almost indifferent, but he saw in the arrival of the Pennyroyal party an escape from an immediate danger, the continuation of that *tête-à-tête* with Amicia, and he accepted Florry's appearance on the scene as an intervention of Providence. After Edward and Alice, who at once paired off as though they belonged to the race of turtle-doves which might be heard cooing in the trees above their heads, the person most pleased with the newcomers was Lord Pennyroyal, who saw in them fresh soil into which he might cast his Silesian sugar-beet. To Amicia's great mortification he selected her for conversation, and as they walked along through the trees to the lodge at Swinley he lost no opportunity of inculcating his views, not forgetting the denunciation of rabbits. In the meantime Lady Pennyroyal had informed Lady Charity that it would give her and Lord Pennyroyal "so much pleasure" if she and Lady Sweetapple would accompany Mr. Fortescue and Mr. Vernon to luncheon between the races to-morrow. Mr. Vernon had already given a conditioned pro-

mise, and so she hoped they might all be persuaded to come. To this invitation Lady Charity was quite ready to listen, for if Harry and Edward were already half engaged, she was quite sure Amicia would only care to be where Harry was. It was settled, therefore, that they should all meet at luncheon next day.

But what were Florry and Harry about? How did they spend that little time, those few hundred yards, amid the balmy woods where the doves were making love to each other in the green shade? We are sorry to say that Harry for a few paces walked sulkily along, and if he smiled it was only when a squirrel frisked up a tree and looked down at them from a forked branch, or when a "yaffle," or green woodpecker, if you do not know the country name, laughed at them and glided up the trunk of one of the monarchs of the forest in quest of its prey. He said nothing—absolutely nothing. For all purposes of speech he might have been as one of Amicia's old friends at the College of the Deafs and Dumbs.

But Florry Carlton was not the girl to let the man she loved walk sullenly along by her side. Her free and frank nature would have it out. The sooner there was a thunderstorm the better; it

would be fine afterwards. Let there be no brooding, lowering clouds to shut out the sun. So she spoke first.

"I was so sorry to have been angry about that silly advertisement, Mr. Fortescue. Have you forgiven me?"

"There was nothing to forgive," said Harry coldly. "You were angry under a mistake, that was all, and there is an end to the matter."

"Oh," said Florry, "I am so glad to hear there is an end of the matter, for I was terribly afraid of E. P."

"Why should you be afraid of E. P., as you call her?" said Harry.

It was not pleasant to Florry to hear Harry call any woman "her," much less after those two initials, which were a mere abstraction, to which Harry had now given life by calling them "her." She answered bitterly—

"Because I felt she was taking away a dear friend."

"She was nothing to me then," said Harry, laying an emphasis on the last word.

"And is she something to you now, Mr. Fortescue? In mercy say she is not."

"I cannot say," said Harry. "I know, in fact, nothing about it."

Poor Florry! By this time they had reached the lodge-gate.

"If you will take my advice, Lord Pennyroyal," said Amicia, who was heartily sick of rabbits and bored to death with sugar-beet—"if you will take my advice, you will get into your carriage and not attempt to walk on this dusty bit of road which leads to Ascot over the Railway Bridge. It is very much cut up by carriages, and more like a desert than a road."

No, Lord Pennyroyal would not walk, he would get into his carriage; and he proceeded to call his party together.

"Are we all here?" said Lady Pennyroyal. "Where's Alice Carlton?"

"Yonder, behind the big tree," said Florry. "I see her dress. I'll call her." And then she cried, "Come along, Alice, we're waiting for you."

Whatever might have happened to the rest, those two under the mighty oak were lost to all feelings except their own; and so it happened that behind that great bole, which might have witnessed the rude addresses of the Saxon swineherds and handmaidens who looked after their lord's flocks and herds on the swine lea, the vows of eternal constancy between Edward Vernon and Alice

Carlton were interchanged, and when she rose in confusion from its shelter at Florry's voice, she felt herself as much wedded to Edward Vernon as if she had been formally married by special licence or thrice called by banns in church.

And so in that short space of time one opportunity was well improved by Edward Vernon, and another as signally wasted by Harry Fortescue. While Alice was skipping up to them like a hind through the ferns, and Edward slowly following—for men recover their confusion, in such cases, much less rapidly than women—Amicia was measuring Florry Carlton with her eyes, and reckoning how much harm she had done her. "To fancy," she said to herself, "that I should have planned this drive and walk only to bring my love into the presence of my rival, and that he should have taken the walk with her while I had to listen to rabbits and sugar-beet! It is too provoking. Though she looks so demure, I am sure, from his guilty look, that he has proposed to her and been accepted."

By this time Alice had sought the shelter of Lady Pennyroyal, and Edward stood a little aloof. He it was that felt guilty, and he did not dare to hand Alice into the carriage. When the Penny-

royal party had departed, Lady Charity said to Lady Sweetapple—

“Now they are gone, Amicia dear, shall we have a little walk and listen to the nightingales? It is only just eight.”

“No,” said Amicia; “the nightingales don’t sing nearly so sweetly in June as they do in May. In fact, I very much doubt whether they sing at all.”

“What do you say, then,” said Harry, merely for the sake of saying something, “to Carew’s verse—

‘Ask me no more whither doth haste,
The nightingale when June is past’?”

“I say nothing to it,” said Amicia crossly. “All I know is that I think the Surrey nightingales, those we heard at High Beech, far sweeter than these can ever be at Swinley. I don’t believe in Berkshire nightingales.”

“But,” said Edward, “we are just on the very borders of Surrey, for Bagshot is in Surrey; and I daresay, if you had let Harry finish the quotation, he would have paid you such a pretty compliment, and one that would have been true, too.”

“How does it end?” said Amicia, evidently expecting Harry to go on and finish the verse. But Harry was again as one of the college at Frankfort,

so Edward, who was as happy as a king, had to do it.

“Here it is—

‘For in thy soft melodious throat
He winters, and keeps warm his note.’”

“How pretty,” said Lady Charity; “and how true as applied to you, Amicia. But shall we walk? I daresay, after all, we shall hear some nightingales.”

“I tell you,” said Amicia positively, “there are no nightingales in Berkshire, and even if there were, they don’t sing in June. More than that, if they sing, I don’t care to hear them. There!” And as she said “there,” she stamped her little foot, and, like Naaman the Syrian, turned and went away in a rage.

“What’s the use?” said Harry, philosophically. “Lady Sweetapple doesn’t care to walk any more. Let us follow her to the carriage and go home.”

So they followed her rather in terror at her temper. “If she will quarrel so with her bread-and-butter,” thought Lady Charity, “who can help her?”

“Oh!” said Edward to himself; “I can see it’s all right. She’s in a rage because Harry has proposed to Florry. I’m so happy!”

“What a temper!” thought Harry Fortescue. “I’m quite sure Edith’s is nothing like that.”

“How provoking! how mortifying! What a fool I was to propose this drive to Swinley!” said Amicia, half aloud. “Never mind, to-morrow shall see my triumph.”

This consoled her a little, and when they got into the carriage she was less cross. And so they drove home and dined, and went to bed and slept in their cabins; and as they kept the windows wide open, and plenty of fresh air came down the chimneys besides, they all slept as well as those could sleep who were so deeply lost in love.





CHAPTER XIX.

MRS. MARJORAM'S CONVERSION.

OUZELMERE, which the Pennyroyals had taken, was a much better house in a less picturesque position than Heath Lodge. It was, as the advertisements say, "replete with every comfort, and in every way fitted for the luxurious abode of a family of distinction." Of course it stood in its "own miniature park of fifty acres." That it had a lake was naturally, or rather, in that waterless region, unnaturally, "a feature of the domain." It was true that the stabling was excellent, the kitchen-garden and forcing-houses "extensive and prolific," the grounds beautifully laid out and planted with the rarest conifers. If Heath Lodge was set on a hill, Ouzelmere was down in the valley, and it so happened it was the very first house that the Pennyroyals reached after they had crossed the Railway Bridge coming from Swinley.

Why was it called Ouzelmere? What a question! Of course, from the water-ouzens which used to inhabit the neighbouring mere, but which, it is believed, were extinct before the Conquest, about the time that the beaver left the same locality. Bones of beavers and water-ouzens have been dug up close by, by a gipsy caravan, in laying the foundation of their camp-fire, and if they could have written they would have instantly have communicated the interesting fact to the Palæontological Society; but as they could not, the scientific world knows nothing of the beavers and water-ouzens of Ascot. But what does all this prove? Surely that Ouzelmere is a very ancient place, for it was named long ago after those Saxon ouzens.

So now you know all about the archæology of Ouzelmere.

“A very excellent villa,” said Lady Pennyroyal, when she arrived, and had inspected the house; “and what charming grounds!”

“Very dear, I think, at a hundred pounds a week,” said Lord Pennyroyal. “How they can have the conscience to ask such a sum I can’t think.”

“I have often heard you say,” said Lady Pennyroyal, “that the price of a thing is what it will fetch, and as good houses fetch that price, or more,

at Ascot during the race week, I really don't see why we should grumble."

"The weak thing was to have come at all," said Lord Pennyroyal.

"Dear me," said Lady Pennyroyal, anxious to change the conversation, "I had quite forgotten the Marjorams all this while. There they are on the terrace. I really must go and speak to them."

Yes, there they were on the terrace, the Marjorams. After that curtain lecture and his outbreak old Marjoram slept better than usual; he felt freer, and as if for once he had asserted his independence. But as for Mrs. Marjoram, she was worse than usual next morning, feeling, perhaps, that her reign of terror was threatened. So Mr. Marjoram suffered at prayers, at breakfast, and at luncheon. Last of all, Mrs. Marjoram was late for the 2.5 train, because she would not have luncheon a little earlier than usual, and so they had to go down by the 4.45 train, with all the stockbrokers who live on the line, and all the horse-jockeys who live on the races. There was, therefore, a great rush of snobs and blackguards, and "respectable people," as Mrs. Marjoram designated her husband and herself, suffered accordingly. However, they got down to Ascot, only nearly an hour late—"very good

going," as the guard said—and the only dreadful thing that happened was that Mrs. Marjoram's big black box had to be left behind at the station, because there were neither flies, nor trucks, nor porters to take charge of it.

"If you were a man," said Mrs. Marjoram, "you would take it up on your back, Mr. Marjoram, and carry it for me to Ouzelmere. That's what you ought to be willing to do on emergency like this."

"But, my dear," said Mr. Marjoram, "I say with Shakspeare, 'I dare do all that doth become a man,' but no man can be expected to carry on his back a box that weighs two hundredweight."

"Mr. Marjoram," said Mrs. Marjoram, like a vinegar cruet full of Chili vinegar, so sharp was she—"Mr. Marjoram, how often have I forbidden you to shock my feelings by quotations from plays and playwrights? It is all very fine to say you can't carry my box—which, after all, is not so heavy—but how, I should like to know, am I to dress for dinner without my amber satin?"

"I am sure I can't tell," said Mr. Marjoram stoutly.

"Mr. Marjoram," said Mrs. Marjoram, now lashed into fury, "I insist on your taking up my

box and carrying it. When I married you, I thought I had married a man."

"And when I married you," said Mr. Marjoram, with unpardonable rudeness, "I thought I had married a wife, but I have found you a tyrant."

"Take up my box!" shrieked Mrs. Marjoram.

"I'll be hanged if I do!" said Mr. Marjoram. "Suppose one of the false prophets had said to any one, 'Take up your bed and walk,' do you think the mere order would have enabled him to do it?"

"Do you compare me to a false prophet?" said Mrs. Marjoram.

"I don't know what to compare you to," said Mr. Marjoram; "but I shall first leave this box in charge of the station-master, with orders to send it up to Ouzelmere as soon as he can, and then I am going to walk to Ouzelmere, and if you don't choose to come with me you may stay behind."

Mrs. Marjoram stared at her husband as though she could not believe her ears, but she said nothing, and when Mr. Marjoram returned from his interview with the station-master she followed him like a lamb.

You may well all of you stare, as much as Mrs. Marjoram, all you wives and husbands who have hitherto only known the henpecked Marjoram. Yet

so it was; the last grain had been heaped on the camel's back, and, instead of breaking it, the camel had kicked and thrown off the whole load, and asserted his independence.

What passed between that pair, as they plodded down the line to the private entrance to Ouzelmere, no one can tell. Some changes are only known by their results. "By their fruits ye shall know them." As for Mrs. Marjoram herself, you all know she was of that school which delights in sudden conversions—in a great blaze of light pouring into the heart and enlightening it in the twinkling of an eye. She was not naturally a bad woman, but long habit and her husband's easiness had turned her into a tyrant. She had grown to be intensely selfish and domineering without knowing it, as is the very nature of selfishness to fancy it is making great sacrifices; and so it is, for it is offering up all the rest of the world on the altar of its own conceit. But now Mrs. Marjoram had found her master, and acknowledged him. She had at last roused that sleeping tyrant which lies in the heart of every lord of the creation, and had to confess, nay, confessed it willingly, that she was a wife, and not a ruler, in her husband's house.

So it was, that when Lady Pennyroyal went to

the Marjorams, and hoped they had got down safely and without trouble, Mr. Marjoram said, rather gruffly—

“We had no trouble till we got to the station, and there, I am sorry to say, we had to leave our luggage behind.”

“Yes,” said Mrs. Marjoram, very meekly; “but it was all my fault for bringing so big a box. Mr. Marjoram’s portmanteau might have come well enough, but no truck could carry my monster.”

“Pray, don’t say anything more about it, my dear,” said Mr. Marjoram. “It was as much my fault as yours. Besides, there is always trouble at railway stations during the races.”

Lady Pennyroyal looked from one to the other in great perplexity—it was so unusual to hear Mr. and Mrs. Marjoram agreeing in anything. But it was no part of hers to take any notice of this strange fact, so she only said—

“I do hope your box will come after all.” Then, with her usual kindness, she added, “As we came here to enjoy ourselves, I think, for to-day at least, we will not have any dressing for dinner, and then it won’t matter whether your box comes before dinner or not. If it hasn’t come by ten o’clock, we will send two of the servants down to the station

to bring it back, or, at any rate, to see that it comes."

"Thank you so much, dear Lady Pennyroyal," said Mrs. Marjoram; and then she and her husband set out for another turn in the grounds.

"I never saw such a change in my life," said Lady Pennyroyal to herself. "They're just like Alice Carlton and Edward Vernon. How glad I am that match is settled!"

"And is it all right, Alice dear?" said Florry Carlton to her sister when they got up-stairs.

"Quite right, darling," said Alice. "I have even told him that papa and mamma quite approve of it."

"Happy girl!" said Florry. "And what did he say?"

"Very little," said Alice, "very little; but he was very pleased, and, and—I sha'n't tell you what he either said or did."

"Happy girl," repeated Florry, "to be engaged to the man you love."

"And you, Florry darling?" said Alice.

"Don't ask me, Alice," said Florry; but for all that, in two minutes Florry had told Alice all that had passed between Harry Fortescue and herself.

"I can't understand it at all," said Alice.

"Nor can I," said Florry. "He was so nice up

to that Saturday morning, and then all at once his manner changed."

"I wonder if Lady Sweetapple has anything to do with it," said Alice.

"Of course she has," said Florry; "she's like idleness in the copy-book—the root of all evil."

"It looks as if she had Harry in her power, by his being down here," said Alice, who did not know that Harry had come down for no other reason than to oblige Edward.

"Yes," said Florry, savagely—"yes; and then taking him out for a walk in Swinley. Of course she meant to walk with Harry, and poor Edward was to stay behind or go before with that old goose, Lady Charity. It is as plain as day; but, thank Heaven, we stopped all that, and she had to listen to sugar-beet instead. I'm so glad she was disappointed."

"And so am I," said Alice, for whose satisfaction at having met Edward so unexpectedly we might coin a new word. If Amicia Sweetapple was "disappointed," as Florry Carlton said, then Alice was "appointed" at being engaged to Edward Vernon.

"They are coming to luncheon between the races to-morrow, you know," said Florry.

"Perhaps Harry will be in a better temper then," said Alice.

"No, I'm sure he won't," said Florry. "He will never be in a good temper so long as he is with that odious woman."

"But if he's always in a bad temper when he is with her," said Alice, "don't you see, dear, he's not likely to propose to her, for men never propose to any one when they're in a bad temper."

"We shall see," said Florry; "in a day or two we shall all be wiser."

Then the Ouzelmere gong sounded, for, of course, Ouzelmere had its gong like all respectable country houses, and the sisters went down to dinner, and saw Mrs. Marjoram in not "clothed," but "in her right mind," as Florry profanely said.

During dinner Lord Pennyroyal was very genial. Perhaps he was pleased at his cousin Marjoram's quiet victory over his domestic tyrant; perhaps he thought he should now have a willing listener to his denunciation of rabbits and praise of sugar-beet. Whatever it was, he was very pleasant, and even seemed to understand, what some people never will see, the difference between colloquy and soliloquy; he not only talked himself, but he allowed others to talk. When dinner was over they all walked round

the grounds of Ouzelmere, and in spite of Amicia's declaration that the Berkshire nightingales could not sing, they did just hear a few late birds "juggling" in the sultry summer night.

Then Alice pressed Florry's hand.

"Ah, if Edward were only here to listen to it too."

"Silly child," said Florry, "why not be content? You have had nine-tenths of your way; will not that satisfy you? I have not even one-tenth."

No! It is hard when Love cannot have his tithes. He ceases to be a god, and to be worshipped.

"Oh, but you know," said Alice, drawing still closer to her sister, "you know it is so sweet to have that last tenth, that all the rest seem as nothing till one gets it. I can enjoy nothing now without Edward."

"And I nothing without Harry," said Florry; "and yet I have no hope of having him. Compare your case with mine, and be thankful."

At the same time Mr. and Mrs. Marjoram were sitting in an arbour looking up at the stars, and to hear them talk one would have thought they had changed skins with Colonel and Mrs. Barker, such

a loving pair they seemed. But we have no time to tell what they said ; the fact must suffice.

As for Lord and Lady Pennyroyal, they too walked about lovingly, and looked up at the everlasting stars. In spite of his stinginess, Lord Pennyroyal was a fine fellow, and, as we have told you, capable of great acts of generosity, though his daily life was defaced by the profession of meanness. And so they too were happy, for Lady Pennyroyal was very fond of him.

And after they had thus gazed and talked in pairs for an hour, Lady Pennyroyal called them in to go to bed. "We have a hard week before us," she said, "and we must go to bed early and rise early."





CHAPTER XX.

THE FIRST DAY OF THE RACES.

NEXT day was Tuesday, the first day of the races, and, according to the description of the newspapers, "the royal meeting" began under the "most favourable auspices." The weather was glorious—a bright, hot sun tempered with a refreshing breeze. Of course there was dust. Races or no races, there is no day without its dust at Ascot. Dusty the heath is, and dusty it will remain till the last man is turned to dust himself. There was the royal party and the red liveries, the gay toilettes, and the fair faces in the Enclosure. A large attendance, free from the horseplay and vulgarity of Epsom. Such was the Ascot meeting of 1870.

Of course Lady Charity and Amicia had a box. It is ten guineas cheaply spent; and from that box they were able not only to see the races themselves, but to let their friends see them. The first thing that the party from Heath Lodge saw, as they were

crossing the dusty road to the entrance to the race-course, was the Pennyroyal party plodding along, through a cloud of dust and a string of carriages, for the Grand Stand, in which every eligible seat had been long since seized and occupied.

“Haven’t you got a box?” asked Lady Charity of Lady Pennyroyal; but before the question could be answered Lord Pennyroyal struck in—

“No, we have not. I really cannot afford it. It is bad enough to take a house at a ruinous rate, without having to take a box besides. I like to be free to move about.”

“If Lady Pennyroyal and the rest of the ladies would come into our box at once I should be so glad,” said Lady Charity.

Dear thing, she was determined to ask them in spite of the black looks of Amicia.

Lady Pennyroyal looked at her husband, who said at once—

“Oh, if Lady Pennyroyal wishes it I have no objection. I daresay Marjoram and I will be quite happy walking about on the green.”

“What do you say, Mrs. Marjoram?” said Lady Pennyroyal.

“I will go where Mr. Marjoram goes.”

So it was settled that Lady Pennyroyal and Florry

and Alice should go at once to the "Charity box," as Amicia called it, while the earl and the Marjorams walked about, and tried their luck in the Grand Stand.

"Remember luncheon at three o'clock," said Lady Pennyroyal, and they parted.

We are sorry that this is not to be an elaborate history of the Ascot Meeting of 1870. So far from this, we do not even know whether our story will last out till the Cup Day, that Thursday of toil and trouble which is really the least enjoyable day of the four. We can only briefly say, therefore, that the racing began with the Trial Stakes, in which what the sporting men call "a speedy miler," Sir Joseph Hawley's Rosicrucian, and Captain Machell's Jack-in-the-Box, and fifteen others, were very cleverly beaten by Green Riband, a horse unbacked by his owner, and considered a "roarer," but who for all that won in splendid style. So far as the party in the Charity box were concerned, that race was chiefly interesting because on it Edward Vernon lost a dozen pairs of gloves to Alice Carlton, while Harry Fortescue, when challenged both by Florry Carlton and Amicia, resolutely refused to bet at all.

"What a big horse," said Edward Vernon when he saw Mr. Merry's Perth win the next race.

"I should think he was, and I have just backed him for his size," said a well-known voice behind him, and when Edward turned round he saw Mr. Beeswing, and behind him Count Pantouffles, who was engaged in a series of elaborate bows to all the ladies. Count Pantouffles would no more have omitted bowing separately to every lady than a man-of-war would neglect to salute the port-admiral on coming into harbour.

"Very hot day and very fine weather," said Count Pantouffles to Amicia. "And the train, *mon Dieu*, it was asphyxiating!"

"I daresay," said Amicia, to whom every newcomer was a cause for anxiety, as she felt she was so much the further removed from that *tête-à-tête* which she longed to have with Harry.

"We saw Lord Pennyroyal and Marjoram and Mrs. Marjoram outside on the Green in the sun," said Mr. Beeswing. "They all seemed very happy, and Pennyroyal said he would not be cooped up in a box for anything. I thought Mrs. Marjoram looked rather subdued."

"You will find her subdued in more ways than one, if it only lasts," said Lady Pennyroyal in a low voice.

"If what lasts?" asked Mr. Beeswing. "Do

you mean the sun? Why, the sun will last for ever. At any rate, he does not wear out his constitution by shining too much in England. Whatever he may do in the tropics, he is not prodigal of his rays in this part of the world. I suspect the sun has a wife in Europe who keeps him in order, as Mrs. Marjoram does Marjoram."

"Don't talk nonsense," said Lady Pennyroyal. "It is well known the sun has no wife. He is a bachelor, and that's why at this time of the year he goes to bed so late."

"Ah, but if he goes to bed late he rises very early; in that at least he is like Marjoram."

"I tell you, you will find it all changed with the Marjorams."

"Since when?" said Mr. Beeswing.

"Since yesterday," said Lady Pennyroyal.

"I don't believe in sudden conversions," said Mr. Beeswing.

The next race was to be the Hunt Cup, and as only two "animals" competed for it, the ladies voted it a bore; besides, they were getting hungry, and longed for luncheon.

"How shall we get to Ouzelmere?" said Lady Pennyroyal. It was a quarter of a mile under a broiling sun, but Lord Pennyroyal would not

have his horses out — they were too tired, he said.

“That is easily settled,” said the thoughtful Lady Charity. “My carriage is ordered outside at half-past two. It is now a quarter to three, and it will take us and Mrs. Marjoram if we can find her. The men may walk.”

So they left the box and found the carriage patiently waiting outside, but they could not find Mrs. Marjoram, and so they were forced to go without her, and drove off.

Count Pantouffles looked very much, in his patent-leather boots, as though he would have liked to have a lift, but he did not get it, and had to tramp along the road with the rest. Edward and Mr. Beeswing were in high spirits, Harry as dull as ditch-water, and Count Pantouffles as lively as usual. As they trudged along the road, and were just going to cut across the heathy bit on the left as a short cut to Ouzelmere, Edward turned round, at the risk of being turned into a pillar of sand which the wind blew into his eyes and over his raiment.

“Holloa !” he said ; “hold hard, here come Lord Pennyroyal and the Marjorams in chase.”

So they halted till the chasers came up, the men grimy with dust, and Mrs. Marjoram “hot, dusty,

and diliquescent" as the curate's wife immortalised by Sydney Smith.

"I'm so glad you turned back, Mr. Vernon," said Lord Pennyroyal; "we knew you by your backs and Count Pantouffles' fine figure"—here the count bowed—"but we should never have overtaken you if you had not stopped."

"I hope you have enjoyed yourself, Mrs. Marjoram," said Mr. Beeswing, feeling his way with that redoubtable woman.

"Oh, indeed, it was charming. Mr. Marjoram was so kind, and so was Lord Pennyroyal. We saw everything, and, in fact, I am now quite an authority on racing."

"It was really great fun," said Mr. Marjoram; "but," turning to Mrs. Marjoram, "I am so sorry you missed the carriage, and have to walk along the dusty road."

"Oh, pray don't think of me," said Mrs. Marjoram, "I am quite happy to walk along the road with you."

"I am not going to walk along this road," said Edward. "Here is a short cut across the heath to Ouzelmere, and I am going to take French leave of the lord of the manor."

If Lord Pennyroyal could have had his way he

would have protested against this trespass, and of the irreverent way in which Edward Vernon spoke of manorial rights—for was he not lord of at least a hundred manors?—but as all followed Edward's example in climbing up the bank and getting on to the heath, Mrs. Marjoram being tenderly helped up by her husband, Lord Pennyroyal would have been left alone to protest on the dusty road, so he put his remonstrance in his pocket and climbed up the bank too.

“How charming it is here!” said Edward, as they followed him across the heath through the self-sown fir-trees. “See, yonder below us are the Ouzelmere chimney-tops. Come along, we shall soon be there.”

So he strode along, and the rest followed as they could. Mr. Beeswing came last of all with Count Pantouffles, who was dreadfully afraid of the dragon-flies as they shot about, and as they went Mr. Beeswing shook his head and said to himself—

“Talk of miracles! Why, this is a sudden conversion indeed!”

In a few minutes they had crossed the heath and came into the Ouzelmere plantations, where, through the Wellingtonias and Deodaras and cypresses, they reached the house.

So there were the greater portion of the High Beech party assembled at Ascot. Alice and Edward as acknowledged lovers—for these secrets soon ooze out amongst women—and Florry and Amicia as rivals for the love of Harry Fortescue, who, as Mr. Beeswing confided to Lady Pennyroyal, was decidedly the “dark horse” of the meeting. Then again changing the metaphor from the horse to his owner, he said, “He could go in and win with either, only he won’t ‘declare.’”

“Perhaps he does not like to be hurried,” said Lady Pennyroyal. “My own opinion is, that he would have proposed long ago to Florry, had not Lady Sweetapple been in the way.”

“Lovers are such strange beings,” said Mr. Beeswing; “but of all strange beings commend me to Mrs. Marjoram. The miracle of Cana in Galilee was a miracle indeed, but that was only the change of water into wine; but here we have vinegar turned at once into oil. I never heard of such a thing in my life.”

“Pray don’t be so profane,” said Lady Pennyroyal; “I don’t like it.”

“But you confess the miracle?” said Mr. Beeswing.

“I confess nothing,” said Lady Pennyroyal;

“but I see a very welcome change in Mrs. Marjoram’s manner to her husband.”

“Do you think it comes from reading the ‘Whole Duty of Man’?” said Mr. Beeswing.

“Say, rather, from reflection on the whole duty of woman,” said Lady Pennyroyal. “But don’t continue the subject, pray; here come the Marjorams.”

We need not dwell on that race luncheon. It was as most race repasts—a kind of Passover eaten in haste, the men with their sticks and the women with their parasols in their hands.

“We must make haste back,” said Amicia, “or we shall miss so many of the races.”

Sly thing! all she wanted was not to leave Florry and Harry alone for a minute.

Back therefore they went, with their meal, not in their sacks, but in their throats. On this occasion Mrs. Marjoram was squeezed into the open carriage, which, fortunately, was a big one, and the gentlemen plodded back across the dry heath and dusty road. Harry and Edward were still faithful to the box, but Count Pantouffles went off on a bowing expedition with Mr. Beeswing. To say that he was supreme in his art, as usual, would but give a faint notion of the exquisite way in which he glided

through the crowd in the "Enclosure," bowing right and left as he went.

"I'll bet a pony," said a racing swell, "that Pantouffles can take off his hat and put it on again sixty times in a minute. Look at him, there he goes!"

"Done, Charley," said another betting swell. "When shall it come off?"

"At Newmarket, at the Houghton Meeting."

"Done," said Charley; and so the match was made.

"It would be much better to handicap Pantouffles against another good bower," said a third swell. "The admiral would do it, I'll be bound."

"Too late," said Charley; "the match is made."

And so the brilliant idea of handicapping Pantouffles against another bower came to nothing.

When they got back to the box, the ladies found they had only lost one race, the Queen's Gold Vase, which only brought two competitors to the post. Formosa, winner of the Leger in 1868, and Siderolite, said by his friends to be the best cup horse in England. The mare had been made the favourite, but Siderolite beat her easily, in spite of Fordham's resolute riding, which some one told Mr. Beeswing was a sight to see. This friend was one of that

consoling class who always try to make out, if you miss anything, that you have lost the sight of the day.

“There’s as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it,” said Mr. Beeswing. “I daresay we shall see some good racing in the Prince of Wales’ Stakes.”

“I don’t think you will,” said his friend, who turned away to find some one else to make uncomfortable.

But, for all that, the Prince’s Stakes did produce a very good race, and, moreover, it was a great surprise. King o’ Scots, one of the sturdy King Tom’s children, won easily by two lengths. He was out of the betting, and thirty to one might have been had against him; but he rushed to the front at once with the lead, and kept it to the end.

“I never saw such a hollow thing,” said Mr. Beeswing, who had found his way into the Charity box again. “I wish I had put on him here some of the money I lost on him in the Two Thousand Guineas.”

At this, Amicia, who had been really looking at the race, turned round to see if Harry Fortescue was all right; but he was gone. He had left the box without making any sign.

"Where's Mr. Fortescue?" asked Amicia, and then her eyes sought for Florry, for she was afraid that Harry might have gone out to take a turn with her rival on the "Green" or in the "Enclosure;" but there sat Florry, between Alice and Edward Vernon. To her Harry's sudden departure was just as much a surprise as to Amicia.

"Oh," said Mr. Beeswing, "I can tell you something about him. Just as I came in, I met your servant, Lady Charity, and he begged me to give Mr. Fortescue a telegram which had just come for him. I gave it to Harry, and then turned my attention to the race. I suppose he has gone out to answer it."

"It is very odd," said Amicia. "I do trust he will soon come back."

So they sat in the box and saw the rest of the races run; but what cared Florry Carlton or Amicia Sweetapple whether a strong favourite was easily defeated by Sir Joseph's Pink for the Two-Year-Old Maiden Plate, or whether Mr. Merry's good-looking colt, King of the Forest, won the Queen's Stand Plate very cleverly from Perfume, "one of the fastest animals of the day over a short course?" The racing, good or bad, was nothing to them without Harry Fortescue, and Harry never came back. At last,

just as the last race was being run, a railway porter put his head into the box, and said, loud enough for every one in it to hear, "Is Mr. Vernon here?"

"Here I am," said Edward. "What do you want?"

"There's a gentleman just gone up to town by the train as begged me to give you this and ask you for 'alf-a-crown."

"Here it is," said Edward, tossing the coin to the man, who vanished, and as he did so Edward whispered to Alice—

"It is from Harry. Shall I open it?"

"Of course," cried Florry, who had overheard the whisper. "What's the use of a note if it is not to be opened?"

So Edward Vernon opened it and read—

"DEAR NED,

"I am obliged to go back to town on business. I can't tell when I shall be back. Make my apologies to the ladies.

"Yours ever,

"H. F."

The eyes of all were turned on Edward as he read the note.

"Is Mr. Fortescue ill?" said Amicia anxiously.

"Please tell me what is in the note," said Florry in the same tone.

"Do read it out, Edward," said Alice.

"I think I may read it out," said Edward, "without any breach of confidence."

Then he read it out, and the faces of two of his listeners at least were clouded as he read.

"Gone to town on business!" cried Florry, who got her breath first, and jumped off into the lead like one of the speedy fillies which they had just seen.

"Gone to town on business!" echoed Amicia. "What business has he to go to town, or rather, what business has he to take him to town?"

But gone Harry Fortescue was. Of that there could be no sort of doubt; and, in the face of that fact, it was useless to conjecture why he went.

"He has gone away," said Florry to Alice as soon as they got back to Ouzelmere. "He has gone, and taken my life with him. I am sure that horrid woman has frightened him away."

"If that forward Florry had not thrust herself into our box, I am convinced he would have stayed. How can a young man propose to one woman when

he knows that another is always watching him?" That was what Amicia said to herself as they walked across the road to Heath Lodge.

In a little while the reader will see how mistaken they both were.





CHAPTER XXI.

WHY HARRY FORTESCUE WENT TO TOWN.

THE telegram which Mr. Beeswing put into Harry's hand was from Mrs. Nicholson. It was short, and ran thus:—

“Mary Nicholson,
“No. —, Lupus Street,

“To—

“Mr. Fortescue,
“Heath Lodge, Ascot.

“Mrs. Price died last night. Miss Edith will be up this evening. Please come to town.”

That was all, but it was more than enough. Harry Fortescue felt that he must fly back to help Edith, though she had rejected him only a few days before.

“Come what will,” he said, “I must go back to arrange about the funeral. What can the poor

girl do by herself, and without a friend in the world?"

He ran to the station, therefore, without waiting for his portmanteau, and luckily caught a train in the very act of starting. Just about the time that the ladies were discussing his sudden departure, he was on his way to town in one of the special race trains.

You will wonder, perhaps, how it was that Mrs. Nicholson discovered where Harry Fortescue was, but that is easily explained. He had been so annoyed by the trouble that Edith had to find his address on a former occasion, that he made Mrs. Boffin a speech before he went to Ascot—such a speech, that worthy woman said, as she had never heard from any of her gentlemen—and told her, if any one came to ask his address, to let them have it without any fuss. When, therefore, Mrs. Nicholson called on Mrs. Boffin, she obtained the desired intelligence at once, and she obtained it all the more readily as no one could have called Mrs. Nicholson "a young person," as Mrs. Boffin had characterised Edith Price.

So far, in fact, was Mrs. Boffin from giving herself any airs on the occasion, that Mrs. Nicholson's heart warmed towards her, and she said as she left—

“You had better, Mrs. Boffin, be getting Mr. Fortescue’s bed ready for him. He’ll be back to-night, or my name is not Nicholson.”

“O la!” said Mrs. Boffin; “you never mean to say so.” And down-stairs she ran, to stir up her slave, the maid-of-all-work.

Harry Fortescue went first to Mrs. Boffin, to tell her that he was come back, and very surprised he was to find that she knew all about it already; then he went to Mrs. Nicholson’s, and saw that worthy woman.

“Oh, Mr. Fortescue,” she said, “I knew you would come, and I said so to Miss Mary and my Betsy. ‘Mr. Fortescue is sure to come,’ I said; and here you are.”

“How is Miss Mary?” asked Harry.

“Poor thing, she be quite beaten down, and lies in her bed. Poor Mrs. Price never held up her head after Miss Edith went; but the doctor never thought the end would be so sudden.”

“That’s what they always say,” said Harry bitterly. “They let people slip through their fingers, and then they say they die suddenly.”

“Oh, pray don’t scold our doctor,” said Mrs. Nicholson; “he is such a good, tender-hearted man.”

"Have you seen about the funeral?" said Harry.

"No, sir," said Mrs. Nicholson; "leastways I have spoken to Mr. Nail, but I have done nothing; I waited for your orders."

"You must go to Mr. Nail at once," said Harry, "and have it all arranged before Miss Edith comes."

"Very good, sir," said Mrs. Nicholson; "and what shall I say to Miss Mary?"

"Tell her that I have come to help her and Miss Edith," said Harry. "Mind and say something kind to the poor thing."

"And when Miss Edith comes," said Mrs. Nicholson, "what shall I say to her?"

"Tell her the same as I said to Miss Mary," said Harry, "and also that I hope to be allowed to see her to-morrow."

And with these words Harry Fortescue turned and left the door.

"There he goes, a Good Samaritan as ever lived," said Mrs. Nicholson, looking after him in great admiration. "That's what I call a gentleman. There he is, down at the races, full of pleasure and company, and as soon as ever he hears this poor lady is dead and her daughters in trouble than he puts himself into the train to come and help them."

So Mrs. Nicholson shut the door and went down to Betsy, telling her she must go out to tell Mr. Nail to come directly.

“There he goes, the bloated arystycrat,” said Mr. Leek to his wife. “He can’t stay away, no, not for a day. Yesterday morning he was ’ere, and ’ere he is again to-day loafing about the ’ouse where that young lady lived.” Then he added, solemnly, “What this country wants, Mrs. Leek, is ’eads, the ’eads of them wicked tyrants as lives for their hown pleasures and trample down the people. There’ll never be any peace in England till the ’eads of them arystycrats roll in the kennel.”

“Quite my sentymint, only more ’appily expressed,” said Mrs. Leek. “But come in, Leek, come in and ’ave a cup of tea.”

After this ebullition of radical feeling, which would fairly have entitled him to the honour of being a Paris incendiary, Mr. Leek, who would have fainted at the sight of blood, retired into his back shop and “’ad his cup of tea.”

As for Harry Fortescue, the unconscious object of so much admiration and obloquy, he walked across the Park to the club feeling neither like Nero nor the Admirable Crichton, nearly choked himself over a solitary dinner, and when it was over he sat

out on the club-balcony gazing at the stars and thinking if Edith Price had returned. It was very rude of him, but truth compels us to say that he did not waste one thought either on Amicia or Florry Carlton. The seed sown ten days ago had shot up and overshadowed him.

After Harry had sat there two hours or more, he came to himself and said—

“I must write to Edward, or the poor fellow will be running away from Alice to look after me.” So he went into the writing-room and wrote as follows:—

“DEAR NED,

“You must have wondered very much at my sudden disappearance, and so must the ladies, to whom I owe a thousand apologies. But I really could not help it. I was forced to go at a moment’s warning, and besides I did not like to disturb your pleasure; I suppose I ought to say your *happiness*. The telegram which Mr. Beeswing put into my hand informed me that poor Mrs. Price was dead, and I felt at once that I must run up to town to see about the funeral. I have not yet seen Edith Price, she only returns to town to-night, but I shall see her to-morrow morning, and I will not forget to

say everything to her from you that ought to be said.

“It is very strange, and it sounds brutal, but I feel happier since I have been in town than I was either at Heath Lodge or Ouzelmere. You need not shock any of the ladies by repeating this, and of course you will keep our relations to the Prices an inviolable secret. I do not think I shall be able to come down again to Ascot, as in the next three days I shall have much to do. On Saturday I conclude you will return to town, and then we shall meet again.

“In the meantime, believe me, dear old fellow, ever yours,

“HARRY FORTESCUE.”

“P.S.—Pray give my best congratulations to Alice Carlton. Though I was so dull down there, I was glad for your sake to see that it was all right.”

When he had finished this letter, Harry thought it best to send it by railway parcel.

“If it goes by post Edward won’t get it till the afternoon.”

So Harry Fortescue, like a good fellow, and not at all like a bloated aristocrat, went off to the Waterloo Station with his parcel and booked it for

Ascot, and then he went home to Mrs. Boffin's, and slept that night better than he had done for ten days. Was it that he looked forward to seeing Edith Price in the morning? What a strange selfish thing love is! What a mixture of motives! Here was Harry Fortescue deeply afflicted at the blow which had fallen on Edith Price, grieving for her with all his heart, and yet rejoicing at the bottom of that very heart that her mother's death was the means of bringing her back to town that he might see her once more.

"It was quite a mistake her going out as a governess, and if I can help it she shall not return to Norfolk. What is Mary to do now her mother has gone? No! she shall never return to Norfolk." And with this protestation ringing in his drowsy ears, Harry Fortescue dropped off to sleep.





CHAPTER XXII.

EDITH PRICE RETURNS TO TOWN.

EDITH PRICE had been very kindly received by the Blicklings. They liked her very much at once—that is to say, Mr. and Mrs. Blickling liked her; and as for the children, they were absolutely in love with her. Children are so apt to adore a new governess very much as they worship a new toy. The charm of novelty had not time to wear off, so they ran about with her in the garden, kissed her at least fifty times a day, sat one on each side of her, and called her every other moment “dear thing” and “darling.” Edith Price, therefore, had every reason to be satisfied with her new position, and yet after all she would have given a good deal to be back in Lupus Street. She was always fretting herself as to how her mother was, and how Mary would manage to exist without her.

“I seemed to be of so little use to them when

I was there," she said, "and yet now I see that I was of great use to them. If it had not been for that tempting salary I would never have left them."

So difficult is it to be quite content under any circumstances. So it went on, and Sunday came, and Edith went to Blickling Church with the Blicklings. The weather was lovely and the trees and walks fine, but all the way to church, and all the way back, and we are sorry to say even occasionally in church, Edith Price thought of that walk to St. Barnabas with Harry Fortescue — Edward Vernon had now quite dropped into the background — and of all he had said on the way back.

"I see it all much more clearly now," she said. "But what could he see to love in a poor orphan like me?"

Edith, as she thought this, little dreamt how soon she was to be an orphan, indeed a double orphan, deprived of both her parents. And yet there the fact remained in her mind that Harry Fortescue, one of the noblest-hearted of men in her experience, and also one of the best-looking, had deliberately made her an offer of marriage, which she had refused.

"It was very cruel, but I could not help it. What else could I do?"

Was the leaven of love working in her heart, too,

and had the little seed which Harry had thrown down, as it were by the way-side, sprung up and begun to show its tiny green blade above the earth ?

So Edith went on all that Sunday thinking and thinking. Governesses have no time to think on any other day of the week. They are free after the children have said their collect and catechism and gone thrice to church. And as she thought and thought Harry Fortescue became more heroic. Now that she was further removed from him, he grew more and more noble ; like a great mountain, his character showed its true proportions at a distance.

By Sunday night Edith Price had quite made up her mind that some day or other Mr. Fortescue would make some woman supremely happy as a husband, and when she woke up on Monday morning she said to herself—

“He took me so unawares. If he had only given me a little more time to know him better, perhaps I might not have refused him so rudely. As it was, I hurt his feelings, but I could not help it.”

Then she went to her day's work ; and what between prayers and music and geography and history and French, and “all the elements of a liberal education,” she forgot Harry Fortescue for a season, and was quite happy with her pupils. The evening

before, that is on the Sunday evening, Mrs. Blickling had asked Edith, as the children said, "to dine down-stairs," and she and Mr. Blickling were so charmed that Mrs. Blickling said when they went to bed she hoped they might often have the pleasure of seeing her in that way, and Edith had gone to bed glad and happy. On the Monday night she went to bed glad and happy, too, but it was because she had thought a little more of Harry Fortescue, and wondered what he was doing at the races, for she knew he was going to Ascot. So she fell asleep thinking of Harry, and so she slept till six o'clock, when a maid came to her bedside and said—

"You must get up at once, miss, here is a telegram for you."

Edith took the telegram, with her eyes full of sleep, and her heart full of Harry Fortescue, if it was conscious of anything, and when she had opened and read it mechanically it told her—

"Mrs. Nicholson,

"No. —, Lupus Street, London,

"To—

"Miss Edith Price,

"Blickling Park, Norfolk.

"You must come up at once. Mrs. Price is very ill."

Oh, those cruel telegrams!—they tell us so much, and yet they say so little; bare facts without a word of explanation. They are heart-breaking in times of grief, and tantalising on occasions of joy. For good or bad, no one was ever satisfied with a telegram.

All that Edith could see or say was that she must go back to town at once. There was an afternoon express which she could catch. Blickling was too far for the morning fast train; there was no hurry, therefore. What is the use of hurrying when hurry is of no use? Mrs. Blickling, when she heard of her trouble, was as kind as a mother to her. They would send her to the station ever so many miles across country. She hoped Mrs. Price would recover, and that Miss Price would return in a day or two. Vain hope!—for even before Mrs. Nicholson had sent that telegram, Mrs. Price was past all worldly care. She was only in her agony five minutes. To break the bad news, the good woman first sent that telegram, and then, in an hour or two, she sent another, which reached the station just before Edith arrived at it in the Blickling carriage on her way to town.

“Here is another telegram,” said the station-master, “just arrived.”

Edith took it with a feeling of despair, and read—

“Too late, Miss Edith. Mrs. Price is no more.”

“Stand back for the London train,” called out the porters and station-master, as the express came screaming and hissing into the station, like a monster as it was.

Edith crumpled up the paper in her hand, stepped into the train, and in a moment more was on her way to London. It was past ten when she reached Lupus Street, worn out with fatigue and sorrow. Good Mrs. Nicholson met her at the door, and her first words were—

“Oh, Miss Edith, I am so glad to see you! I knew you would come. But Mr. Fortescue has been here hours ago, and he has given all the orders that are necessary.

“Let me go up to her at once,” said Edith, passing Mrs. Nicholson and flying up-stairs.

“Miss Mary is in bed and asleep, poor thing!” cried Mrs. Nicholson, mistaking Edith’s meaning. Her words had reference to the dead, and not to the living. It was not to her sister, but her mother, that she was flying. In a moment more, Edith Price was in her mother’s room, alone

with all that remained of her, bending over the wan, wasted face, and covering it with kisses and tears.

Then, after a few sad minutes, she went to Mary's room, and kissed her, and woke her up, and the sisters wept together, remembering their mother. They would have sat together holding each other in their arms half the night, but Mrs. Nicholson would not suffer it. She made Edith come down and have some food.

"You must be famishing, Miss Edith. I'll be bound you never tasted anything all the way up."

"I did not," said Edith; "but I did not want it. I don't want it now."

"But you must eat, you know, Miss Edith. Consider what you have to go through."

"Very true," said Edith, suffering herself to be crammed like a fowl by Mrs. Nicholson.

"Mr. Fortescue has been very kind," said Edith sadly.

"Kind is not the word, Miss Edith," said Mrs. Nicholson, who, as you know, was Harry's most enthusiastic champion. "He's as good as gold, and as true as steel. When I think of him, I say to Betsy, 'Betsy, if all the young men were like Mr.

Fortescue, there wouldn't be so many aching hearts after women were married.'"

"Yes," said Edith; "he has been very kind. Did he say anything?"

"Bless me, I forgot!" said Mrs. Nicholson. "He said he hoped you would allow him to see you to-morrow."

"Very well," said Edith, "I will see him to-morrow; and now, Mrs. Nicholson, I think I had better go to bed."

"It is all ready for you, Miss Edith—your old bed, and may you have some sleep. God will send it you, I am sure, for you deserve it, Miss Edith."

So Mrs. Nicholson lighted Edith up to bed, and then she climbed up to her own couch in the back attic, which she shared with Betsy.

"Dear me," she said, "what a world of trouble this is! How should we ever get on if we hadn't to work, instead of sitting idle all day, thinking of our sorrows."

And then the helpful woman lay down and slept the slumber of the good, while over the way the ferocious Mr. Leek was also lost in sleep, and possibly dreaming of the good time coming, when all the men and women in this country should wear red

caps, and it would be a hanging matter if any one could not prove that he had lived on vegetables alone three days in the week. "Then, and then only," said Mr. Leek, muttering between his teeth in his sleep, "will greengrocers 'ave their just rights."





CHAPTER XXIII.

HARRY FORTESCUE SEES EDITH PRICE, AND HAS AN
INTERVIEW WITH BOWKER.

WHEN Harry Fortescue woke next morning, his first thought was to fly to see Edith, and his next that he would be a fool to go so early, and that he had better stay away. "If she only came up to town so late, she will need rest, and rise late this morning. I must stay away till the afternoon."

This he thought as he lay in bed, listening for the descent of the maid-of-all-work.

"There she goes at last," said Harry. "Poor domestic sloth, how she creeps and crawls down-stairs."

Then in due time came Mrs. Boffin's vigorous footfall. By that sturdy step alone the medical adviser of an insurance company would have passed Mrs. Boffin as a thoroughly healthy life,

without even looking at her, much less stethoscoping her or feeling her pulse.

“Now it’s my turn,” said Harry, after he had lain, or “lien,” as the Psalms say, not “among the pots,” but on what is quite as bad, the “tenter-hooks of expectation,” whatever they may be, longing to get up, and yet not daring to do so till Mrs. Boffin had eaten “her” breakfast. From this, again, you may see what a vigorous woman Mrs. Boffin was, when even her lodgers were afraid to get up till she had devoured her morning meal.

Then Harry Fortescue shook the bedclothes from off his feet, and rose and had his breakfast, thinking all the time of Edith, and feeling sure that, after all, he would much rather be in town than at Ascot.

“It’s very odd,” he said, as he turned out of Mrs. Boffin’s, weed in mouth—“it’s very odd, but I like London much better than the country.”

He went, of course he went, to Lupus Street, his paragon of streets. It was half-past nine. There was Mr. Leek watching him, and wondering if he would buy “some of them British Queens;” but Harry, though he saw him and his strawberries, would have nothing to say to either of them. Mr. Leek touched his hat, but Harry strode on across

the street, and pulled the bell loudly. When Mrs. Nicholson came to the door, he said—

“Has Miss Price come?”

“Yes, she has, Mr. Fortescue. She come last night; but you can’t see her yet, she’s a-bed.”

“I only wanted to know if Miss Price had come. That’s quite enough,” said Harry. “I’ll come back in the afternoon.” And with that he strode away.

“There ’e goes,” said Mr. Leek—“a proud, hingsolent peacock as hever strutted. An ’onest greengrocer touches ’is ’at to ’im, and he never so much as gives ’im a nod. Yes, what we want is ’eads. He might ’ave bought one punnet.”

But Harry Fortescue neither heeded him nor his strawberries. In his mind he was soaring up into some seventh heaven, and in his body he was making his way to the Park, where he might sit on a chair under his favourite tree, and seem to look at the gay crowd, but in reality think of Edith.

“Much better to be here than sweltering in a box at Ascot, talking to a pack of people about whom one does not care a bit. I wonder how Ned gets on though, and if he has got my letter.”

So Harry Fortescue sat and thought, and at last, when the sun rose higher and the friendly shade deserted him, he walked into Piccadilly, called a

hansom, drove to the club, and read the papers. After that he was hungry, and had luncheon, and at three o'clock he was at Mrs. Nicholson's door again.

"Yes, Miss Edith is up, and will be glad to see you," said Mrs. Nicholson.

With a flutter at his heart, Harry Fortescue went up-stairs, and there, in the poky back drawing-room, he saw Edith and Mary. Edith was wan and thin, he thought, but looking more lovely than ever.

"Oh, Mr. Fortescue," said Edith, but she could get no further. She had misreckoned her strength, and burst into tears.

"It has been such a comfort to me," said Harry, "to be able to have given you any help in your great affliction."

"It was so sudden," said Edith sobbing, and still unable to check her tears.

"I think I had better go," said Harry, who really did not know what to do or say.

"Oh, pray do not go," said Edith. "I shall be better presently."

So Harry Fortescue stayed, and talked a little to Mary till Edith recovered herself, and then they all talked seriously and sadly, and Harry seemed more like a brother to them than Edith's

lover. And time passed, and when Harry looked at his watch it was half-past four. Then he rose to depart. But before he left he said—

“There is one painful thing I must say before I go. Mrs. Nicholson tells me that Mr. Nail says the funeral must be on Saturday.”

“I know it already,” said Edith. “It is terribly soon, but it cannot be helped.”

“Then it is fixed for Saturday morning,” said Harry, and he left the sisters.

We have said his behaviour was more like that of a brother than a lover during that sad interview, and this was perfectly natural and right. It must be a very brutal lover who would dare to make love to a girl over the unburied body of her mother. We do not say that lovers have never done it, but then lovers are sometimes such fools, and they have the excuse of the widow of Ephesus, who made love over the unburied body of her husband; but then widows are not girls, and their example ought not to be quoted against them. At any rate, Harry Fortescue had too much good taste and feeling to breathe one word of love to Edith that afternoon, and Edith quite understood it, and was very grateful to him for it. But there is a way of making love without words—by stealth as it were; and Edith Price that

evening felt that Harry Fortescue was more in love with her than ever.

“It is all over now, of course,” she said; “and I have refused him; but I feel in my heart that he is in love with me, and that when I refused him I refused a noble heart.”

This time when Harry Fortescue went out he had eyes for the greengrocer, who really had what greengrocers so seldom have—some strawberries freshly gathered that afternoon.

“’Ave a punnet, Mr. Fortyskew?” said the bloodthirsty Mr. Leek, who before this had found out Harry’s name from Betsy when she ran over one morning to buy some “water-creases,” and had learned to pronounce it phonetically—“’ave a punnet, Mr. Fortyskew? ’ere’s beauties.”

“These poor girls would like some strawberries, I daresay,” said Harry to himself. Then to Mr. Leek, as Love never does anything by halves, “Yes, I will have two punnets;” for Love, as you all know, is like Naaman the Syrian as well in its generosity as in its wrath. With Love it is ever “be content, take two talents;” and this is why so many designing people prey on Love and make money out of him, because he is proverbially blind and cannot see their deceitfulness—too seldom, alas! punished

by Gehazi's leprosy. If every one that cheated Love in London were smitten as the prophet's servant, the streets of this metropolis would be thronged with people walking up and down as white as snow.

But to return to Harry Fortescue. He ordered two punnets, and paid five shillings for them, bidding Mr. Leek, who now treated him as a regular customer, send them over to No. —.

“Yes, Mr. Fortyskew; certainly, sir, in a minute, sir. Hawful dispensation, sir, this 'ere sudden death of Mrs. Price. Death comes on us like 'grass in June. We walks up and down the beds and sees never a sprout; in 'alf an hour the bed's alive with 'em.”

But by the time Mr. Leek had ended this affecting comparison between death and asparagus, Harry Fortescue was out of hearing. He had no objection to buy the greengrocer's strawberries, but he would not listen to his moralising; but for all that Mr. Leek finished his sentence, and then went into Mrs. Leek in his back shop.

“There he goes, Fortyskew, Esquire, the aristocrat, who wouldn't so much as listen to an 'onest man. But I've made 'im pay for it, Jemima Anne; I've made 'im pay for it. Them British Quveens only

stood me at eighteenpence, which I've made 'im pay for them 'alf-a-crown."

"Quite right, Leek, quite right," said Mrs. Leek. "Them arystycrats is 'anded over to us by 'Eaven to spile, and we do spile them as the Hisraelites of hold spiled the Egyptians."

By this time Harry Fortescue was far away towards the Pimlico Pier, and on his way to the Temple, to give notice to his clerk that he meant to come really to work the week after; but unfortunately he surprised Mr. Bowker giving a banquet in his chambers to some congenial spirits who had gathered round him and his stout in consequence of his "stunning" speeches at Cogers' Hall.

The banquet had been fixed for five o'clock precisely, and Mr. Bowker had even issued a card for it on which was written this—

"MR. BOWKER,
AT
ONE.
PUMP COURT, JUNE 15TH,
T. W. B. S."

In the corner opposite to these mysterious initials was written in Mr. Bowker's best hand—and, in fact, the whole card was his handiwork—"W. B. expects an hanser." From which and other pecu-

liarities of the card it may be seen that it is very certain that Mr. Bowker is not a candidate for the solicitors' examination, as he would most certainly be plucked for spelling.

But to come back to Mr. Bowker's card. What was the meaning of those letters, T.W.B.S.? If all the rest of the world were ignorant of their signification, Mr. Bowker's world well knew it. Those mysterious initials simply said to the initiated, "There will be speaking." Such a genial company could not part till some flowers of oratory had been gathered from the lips of Bowker and others. The "at 'ome" was modest but ample. It consisted of "beefsteaks and onions, and plenty on 'em." Those were Mr. Bowker's very words when he gave his orders to Martha Briggs, the old laundress; "and take care that they are 'ot," he added. Then there was Cheshire cheese and radishes to follow, and the whole was washed down by foaming pots of stout.

We are sorry to say that this banquet of the gods was very much disturbed by the sudden appearance of Harry Fortescue just as the steaks and onions had vanished, and the cheese and radishes were being brought down the staircase by the old woman. The oak of course was not sported, that is, the outer door which had defied Edith's attack was not shut.

Harry Fortescue, therefore, ran up the wooden stairs and made his way into his chambers without in the least knowing the orgy that was happening, and before the old sloth on the stairs could stop him. Had he known that Mr. Bowker was at High Jinks in his rooms he would not have rushed in; but as he knew nothing about it, and only thought, from the universal onionism of the staircase, that the old laundress had been indulging in a debauch of that wholesome but loud-smelling esculent over her tea, he came unawares upon all that jovial company of orators.

He arrived, too, at a very critical moment. It was just in the interval between the steaks and cheese that Mr. Docket, the managing clerk of Sharp, Snap, and File, of Staple's Inn, had proposed the 'ealth of what he called their "'Hamphitriton,' William Bowker, Esquire." There sat the "Hamphitriton" modestly at the end of Harry's law-table, "prepared but ready," as another of the company said, "to 'alectrafry' them with 'is heloquince," and all the rest were rising and draining their 'alf-pint pots, and calling out, "'Ere's your 'ealth, Bowker;" "Long life to you, Bowker;" "'Ere's to our next merry meeting," and so on, and so on.

It so happened that as all faces were turned to Bowker, and he sat at the end of the long law-table, opposite the door, it was only Bowker who saw that it was his master, and not the old laundress, who had entered the room. But all these clerks and law-writers knew that something must have happened, for the face of Bowker—which up to that very moment had been jolly and rubicund, and his eyes full of that fire of oratory with which he was just about to overwhelm his audience—suddenly changed to an ashen hue, while his eyes all at once became as dull and bleary as over-ripe gooseberries. But even in that moment of trial Mr. Bowker felt that something must be done, and that something was to apologise to Harry. He started on his feet, therefore, rather prematurely, while the volley of compliments was still ringing in his ears, and exclaimed—

“Mr. Fortescue, sir, I ’umbly asks your parding.”

You all know, or ought to know by this time, that Harry Fortescue was not a man to spoil sport. It even consoled him, so near akin is pathos to humour, to have come from that sad meeting in Lupus Street to this ludicrous festivity in Pump Court. He reflected, too, that Mr. Bowker had nothing to do, except to draw his weekly wages, and that as he and Edward were lazy themselves, so

would their clerk be. Like master, like man, he thought; and as he thought, he forgave Mr. Bowker his impertinence, and fairly burst out laughing, in which the whole company heartily joined. They were just in that state when the wine is in but the wit is not out, and they had drank just enough beer to be keenly alive to a joke. When Harry Fortescue recovered his countenance, he said—

“I am glad to see you so comfortable, Bowker, and I hope you and your friends will have a pleasant evening.”

“’Ark to ’im calling of him Bowker!” said one of the guests. “Why, he’s a jolly good fellow.”

Then, with a happy inspiration, some one caught at the phrase, and roared out, “Mr. Fortescue’s ’ealth, for he’s a jolly good fellow.”

So Harry’s health was drunk in his own rooms, Mr. Bowker leading the chorus, and in the midst of it he escaped and fled from that room and that staircase redolent with beer and onions, nor did he stop till he stood on the Thames Embankment.

“That fellow, Bowker!” he said. “But he’ll have to mend his ways. Next week I shall begin to work in chambers, and then no more High Jinks for Bowker.”



CHAPTER XXIV.

HARRY'S SECRET OOZES OUT.

WE forgot to say that, when the races were over on Tuesday, it was settled that the Heath Lodge party should walk over on Wednesday morning and see the grounds at Ouzel-mere.

“It will be something to do,” said Lady Pennyroyal, “before the races begin.” Lady Charity, kind old soul, at once consented, for she wished to bring Alice and Edward as much together as possible. Amicia did not object, nor Florry, of course; the latter, because the arrangement would please her sister; the former, because Florry could do her no harm, now that Harry Fortescue was away.

Amicia awoke very early that Wednesday morning, quite as early as Harry Fortescue in fact, but for a very different reason. She was pining because she had lost her love; he, because he was just about to find her. In the one case it was the wakefulness

of despair; and in the other, the watchfulness of hope.

"I think we had better start for Ouzelmere as soon as we can," said Lady Charity.

"The sooner the better," said Amicia. "The sooner we go, the sooner it will be over."

Edward Vernon was naturally anxious to go, and so it happened that they were off and away to Ouzelmere, by that short cut across the heath which belonged to the lord of the manor, before Harry Fortescue's letter to Edward Vernon arrived.

When they reached Ouzelmere, they found the whole party walking on the terrace, and they set out at once to explore the domain of fifty acres. Any auctioneer who described those grounds as laid out with a taste regardless of expense, would have been quite right. There were the best grapes, the best peaches, and the best fruit of every description in the country round. It was popularly reported that every radish eaten at Ouzelmere cost the spirited proprietor half-a-crown. As you may reconstruct a lion from the tip of one of his laws, so you may calculate the expense of keeping up Ouzelmere from that one culinary fact. Then there were all about the grounds the choicest firs and deciduous trees—maples that in autumn set the woods ablaze;

and, in the summer, beds of the choicest rhododendrons, that made the whole garden glow. On and on through these plantations of rare shrubs the party went, now stopping to admire the view, now pausing to pluck a rose, till the end of the domain was reached, and they had to turn or go on through a grove of firs to the native heath.

It so happened that Alice and Edward led the party, a good way in front. Those behind respected the feelings of young lovers, and would not hurry them by treading on Love's heels; so it was, that when they came to the turning-point, when they must either double back to the house or push on through the wood, Alice said to Edward—

“The fragrance of that pine-wood is so balmy, let us go on. We have had enough of art, now let us try the charms of nature.”

To hear was to obey with Edward, and they were well on among the tall trees before the rest came up.

“I suppose we must follow them,” said Lady Pennyroyal as she crossed the boundary; and where she went the others followed.

“See,” said Florry to Amicia, “there is a gipsy encampment on the heath. Let us turn back.”

“Let us rather press on,” said Amicia. “Who

can tell whether we may not have our fortunes told?"

"Mine is told already," said Florry sadly.

"And mine is yet to tell," said Amicia proudly, as she dashed on after Alice and Edward, who had stopped at the verge of the wood, before the encampment on the open heath.

It was the usual gipsy-waggon, the same sharp-eyed, middle-aged women, the same wrinkled old crones, the same brown, half-clad children, and the same bright-eyed, olive-cheeked maidens.

But there was one of them whom Amicia recognised at once. It was Sinaminta, the woman whom they had met under King Edward's Oak at High Beech, whose nomad family had been attracted to Ascot by the races.

Nor was the recognition on her side alone. When Amicia went up to her and said, "We have met before," Sinaminta answered in a moment—

"Yes, we have met before. I see many here whom I met before," she added, glancing round the rest of the party, who had by this time come up. "But I miss one, and that one the gentleman who spoke most to me. Where is he? Does he not come to the races?"

It is for you to tell us where he is," said Amicia.

Yes," said Florry, "do tell us where he is."

Can't you guess where he is?" said Sinaminta, mockingly. "Two pretty ladies, both asking at me of a poor Romany where a handsome young man is. He was with you under King Edward's oak; why has he not come with you to the heath?" "We will not tell you, Sinaminta," said Amicia. "It is for you to tell us where he is."

"We do not know where he is," said Florry passionately; "and we both wish so much to know."

"Ah," said Sinaminta, still in the same mocking tone, "you both want to know so much! I can tell you. He is with a third lady, whom you do not know. That same young lady of whom I spoke to you under the oak."

"Do you mean the dark young lady in the background?" said Amicia very incautiously, in her anxiety of heart.

"Yes," said Sinaminta; "he is with her. How can you doubt it, if he is not with you?"

"I don't believe it," said Florry. "I believe he is somewhere else."

"Believe it or not, as you like," said Sinaminta. "I will say no more."

Then she turned to Edward Vernon and Alice, and wanted him, with a whine so different from the free way in which she had just been speaking, to have his fortune told, "and the pretty lady's."

"We don't want it told," said Edward; "we know it already."

"You had better give her something, dearest," whispered Alice to Edward, "or she will be saying something dreadful, and I shall never get it out of my head."

"Anything rather than spoil our holiday," said Edward; and as he spoke he crossed Sinaminta's hand with half-a-sovereign.

"And shall I not tell yours?" said the gipsy to Amicia.

"I can tell my own fortune," said Amicia.

"Nor yours?" said Sinaminta, turning to Florry.

"No, nor mine. I don't believe in fortune-telling."

"Yes, proud ladies," said Sinaminta, "you will both believe when you hear that the handsome young gentleman prefers the dark young lady to both of you."

"Of course we shall believe it when we know it," said Amicia turning away, her heart again filled with vague fears of E. P. and her influence.

“Those gipsies are a great nuisance,” said Lord Pennyroyal, as they slowly retraced their steps through the wood. “They ought to be put down by the good sense of the community, as well as by act of parliament. Caravans, too, ought not to exist. Here we have a good example of this. A pack of idle gipsies, squatting on the common, burning the lord of the manor’s heath. I see, by the gorse which grows all about, that the soil is good. It ought to be enclosed, every acre of it; and, if it were mine, I would break it up and sow it with sugar-beet.”

By the time he had ended, the party were again on Ouzelmere land; and, shortly afterwards, Lady Charity and her two chickens struck off from the rest across the heath, and got back to Heath Lodge before twelve o’clock. The first thing that met Edward’s eyes was the railway parcel, directed in Harry’s hand. If he had been at all of a reticent nature, he would have taken the parcel up to his room, or gone out of doors with it, and read it, reserving to himself the right to say nothing about it if it were not for Harry’s interest. But Edward Vernon was not one of those sluggish, deliberative natures. He lived for and with his friends; he was gregarious, not solitary; so he cried out at once—

"Here's a letter from Harry. Now we shall know all about him."

Lady Charity stood ready to listen, but we are sorry to say that Amicia was rude, very rude.

As soon as Edward opened the letter, and his face changed on reading it, she snatched it out of his hands, read it, threw it on the ground without saying a word, ran up to her room, and was not to be seen by any one but Lady Charity for the rest of the day.

The blow had fallen when she least expected it. She had made Edith Price safe, as she thought, and at Ascot she felt herself quite a match for Florry Carlton; but here something providential had happened, something which it had never entered into her calculations to guard against. The mother of the rival she had so much dreaded had died, and the mere intelligence of that calamity had been enough to recall Harry Fortescue to London and to throw him into the power of Edith Price. It was too dreadful. She would not and could not bear it. And though, at last, Lady Charity mounted the ladder and forced her to unlock the door of her cabin, she found her deaf to any words of comfort, and quite resolved not to go to the races that day.

“What is to be done?” said Lady Charity in despair; for Lady Charity was the pink of politeness—the carnation or picottee, we might almost say, she was so polite—and you must know that her last words on leaving Lady Pennyroyal had been—

“Well, remember we reckon on your making your way to our box to-day.”

“I don’t care what’s to be done,” said Amicia. “They may go to the box, and welcome, only I won’t go to it;” and then she burst into tears of mortification.

“I think I will send Mr. Vernon over to say that you are unwell, and that I am staying with you to nurse you, and that they are welcome to the box. Poor fellow, it will be very dull for him here.”

“Do as you like,” said Amicia sobbing. “I am quite broken down, and can’t go.”

“But, darling, did he say anything horrible in that letter?” asked Lady Charity. “Is he going to be married?”

“Not so bad as that, quite,” sobbed Amicia; “but very bad. Edith Price’s mother has died suddenly, and Harry Fortescue rushed back to town to see about the funeral; and Edith Price is coming back

to town. And by this time they have met, and all my plans are wrecked and ruined."

"I don't see why a young man should marry a governess, however pretty she may be, when it is only proved that he has gone back to town to bury her mother."

"That's only because you don't know Harry," said Amicia. "He would marry any one he likes, governess or no governess. And now this artful little wretch will get hold of him and marry him. Did you not hear what the gipsy said?"

"Don't be so silly," said Lady Charity. "I don't know, of course, what Mr. Fortescue may do, young men nowadays are so very strange and free-thinking; but as for putting any faith in what that vagabond woman said, I think it quite ridiculous."

"That's only because you're not in love with Harry," said Amicia with a fresh flood of tears. "Besides, she only says now what she said at High Beech."

"Of course she says the same thing now," said Lady Charity. "She made a chance hit then which she saw went home, and now she sticks to it—that's all. Now, do be reasonable."

But Amicia would not be reasonable, and so

Edward Vernon ran across to Ouzelmere just in time to catch the Pennyroyals, and to accompany them to the Charity box, as he called it.

Lord Pennyroyal was still resolute about his horses, and so the whole party had to trudge across the short cut and along the dusty road ; but it was a sight to make every husband rejoice to behold how well Mrs. Marjoram's conversion lasted. It was no outside dye, Mr. Beeswing said, when he saw them again on the Cup Day, but the change of colour had gone right through the stuff—she had been dyed to the hue of a good-wearing wife, and she had been dyed ingrain. Not even Mrs. Barker could have been so loving to her husband, the gallant colonel, or so kind.

“This is almost as bad as the Runn of Cutch,” said Edward to Mrs. Marjoram, as they got upon the road.

“Ah, that dear Colonel Barker,” said Mrs. Marjoram, “how I wish he were here to enjoy this fine weather !” In her heart we know Mrs. Marjoram still detested races, she could not be expected to praise them, but she showed her conversion in not denouncing in an uncharitable manner amusements in which others took pleasure. Nor was she perpetually reminding Mr. Marjoram that she had

come to Ascot for his pleasure alone. She had ceased to be a domestic martyr, and begun to be a faithful wife.

But we have no time to dwell on this delightful change.

Long before Edward Vernon had reached the Charity box, Alice Carlton had found out that he had heard from Harry Fortescue, and she was now bent upon that explanation which had been promised to her at High Beech.

"If you love me, Edward," she said, in that sweet lover's voice which is not quite a whisper, "you will tell me all about it, for Florry's sake."

"I had much rather tell it for yours," said Edward.

"Then tell it for mine; only tell it, and tell it at once, or I won't love you one bit."

Whether Edward Vernon was really afraid that Alice would pout and play the tyrant as she had threatened, or whether he was so much in love with her that he forgot everything else but her desire, we cannot say, but certain it is that before they left that Charity box Edward Vernon had told Alice the whole story of Harry's connection with the Prices, and that Alice and he had now no secrets on the subject.

“Was I not right in saying that it could all be explained?” he asked, as they sat side by side and alone though in the midst of their friends.

“Yes, and nobly explained,” said Alice. “It makes me proud of you, and,” she added, “of having Harry Fortescue as my friend. But tell me one thing more, is Harry in love with Edith Price, and is she very charming?”

“She is not nearly so charming as another young lady I could name,” said Edward; “but as for Harry’s being in love with her, all I can say is, I know nothing about it. If he is in love he has not taken me into his confidence.”

“Thank you so much, for poor Florry’s sake. I feel when I see you that Harry is not in love yet with Florry, but it will be a comfort to know that he is not in love with any one else.”

“Put not your trust in men,” said Edward, “their hearts are so deceitful.”

“But I put my trust in you,” said Alice.

“Oh, of course,” said Edward, giving her just one little nudge; “but then, you know, the present company are always excepted.”

So now Harry Fortescue’s “inviolable secret” was revealed, for when three people know a secret it is no secret. As soon as Edward Vernon’s back was

turned—for as in duty bound he returned to dine at Heath Lodge—Alice Carlton repeated what she had heard to Florry, and Florry told it all to Lady Pennyroyal.

“How very noble in those young men to have supported a destitute family so long!”

“Very noble,” said Florry with a sigh, for she could not help feeling if Harry Fortescue’s generosity were to end in his marrying Edith Price, it would have been much better for her if he had not been generous at all.

“And this explains all that mystery about the advertisement,” added Lady Pennyroyal. “When we were all so hard upon Mr. Fortescue after breakfast at High Beech, some of us thought he would turn out to be very wicked or very silly, but though he could have justified himself he never opened his mouth; he was in fact a martyr to his generosity.”

“Yes, we were all very unjust to him,” said Florry, cut to the heart at the recollection of that scene she had with him in the conservatory.

“I really must tell Lord Pennyroyal all about it,” said Lady Pennyroyal. “He, I know, thought the advertisement was mixed up in some way with gambling debts, and there is nothing that he hates so

much. But there is one thing which he admires above all things—generosity in others; and though you will scarcely believe it, my dear, in great things Lord Pennyroyal is one of the most generous men in the world.”

“I think every one who had an unfavourable feeling against Mr. Fortescue is bound to make him amends,” said Florry, hardly restraining herself from bursting into tears.

So Lady Pennyroyal that very night before dinner told the whole story to Lord Pennyroyal, who said it was very generous and very Quixotic, and in such young men too.

“I have heard of young men being generous to this person or that, but that they should take upon their shoulders the support of a whole family for so many years passes my comprehension. It was very noble, but, I repeat it, very Quixotic.”

That was all that Lady Pennyroyal could extract from her husband in praise of Harry and Edward.

But for all that Lord Pennyroyal, though he was no gossip, went and told the story to Mr. Marjoram, and Mr. Marjoram told it to his wife.

“I do think,” said Mrs. Marjoram, “it’s the most noble, unostentatious act of munificence I ever heard of. Depend upon it, these young men will

have their reward in heaven. I am quite proud to reckon them among my friends."

"So am I," said Mr. Marjoram; and so the whole world at Ouzelmere knew the "inviolable secret," and thought it a great feather in Harry's cap that he should have gone away from the races so quietly to help the fatherless and motherless in their affliction.

"Oh, Alice," said Florry, when she went to bed that night, "how unjust I have been to him, and how wicked to quarrel with him in the conservatory at home! Do you think he will ever come back to me?"

"Who can tell?" said Alice; "or rather, why should he not come back? We have no proof that he has ever breathed a word of love to Edith Price."

"No proof except a woman's instinct. But of one thing I am really glad, that he is not in love with Lady Sweetapple."





CHAPTER XXV.

THE CUP DAY, AND WHAT HAPPENED.

NEXT day was the Cup Day, and it quite kept up its character for dust and discomfort. The country generally finds the dust and the company the discomfort ; for if there be no room to move, and many thousand vehicles and human beings are all concentrated on Ascot Heath, how can any one be comfortable? But of all the uncomfortable people present on that day, Amicia was the most. There she sat in the Charity box staring into vacant space. What did it matter to her that the royal party arrived at half-past one, the procession consisting of five carriages driving up the course to the royal enclosure, preceded by the Master of the Buckhounds, and received with "the usual enthusiasm?" What did it signify to her that every available spot which could command a view of the royalties, as they came along in all the glory of scarlet and gold, was occupied by an elegantly-

dressed woman, who held her own with an energy of which a mere man is quite incapable? What did she care that Mr. Merry's magnificent-looking chestnut colt, Sunlight, ran in a hood and blinkers for the St. James's Palace Stakes, which he refused to win from sheer wilfulness, and was therefore stigmatised, by all who had backed him, as the most uncertain and ill-tempered horse that ever trod the turf; or that, after a splendid race between Baron Rothschild's Corisande and Bothwell, the Baron's filly won the New Stakes by a neck? She hated the races, and all that belonged to them, now that she knew too well that Harry Fortescue was wasting his time in town with Edith Price. When the interval of an hour allowed for luncheon after the New Stakes came, she was sulky and would not stir from the box. The Pennyroyals walked home to luncheon as usual, but Amicia would not go with them. "She was not at all hungry; she would sit there;" and there she would have sat till six or later and starved, had not that dear Lady Charity run over to Heath Lodge and brought her some sandwiches and a glass of sherry in a flask.

"Thank you so much," said Amicia, munching the food mechanically. "But do you think Harry Fortescue will return to us to-day?"

"I am afraid not," said Lady Charity. "You know he rather implied in his letter that he should not be able to return to the races at all."

"Rather implied!" said Amicia with indignation, "why, he said outright that he would not come. It is all on account of that Edith Price; I am sure of it."

"We do not know that he has the least intention of marrying her," said Lady Charity. "Why vex yourself with idle fancies?"

They could not discuss this very interesting matter at greater length, for by this time the Pennyroyals had come back, and Edward with them.

"Have you heard anything since you left of Mr. Fortescue?" asked Amicia.

"No; I am sorry to say I have not," said Edward; "but I saw Mr. Beeswing outside with Count Pantouffles; they have come down for the Cup Day. Perhaps they may have seen him in town. They will come into the box directly to see the race for the Cup."

In a minute or two after the Count and Mr. Beeswing came in.

"Have either of you seen anything of Mr. Fortescue in town?" said Amicia. "He ran away from us on Tuesday, as you know, and he has never come back."

“I should have him cried if I were you,” said Mr. Beeswing. “He ought to be ashamed of himself. Why don’t you take a leaf out of E. P.’s book, and advertise for him in the newspapers, thus :—

“ ‘ Ascot Races.

“ ‘ SWEETAPPLE TO FORTESCUE.

“ ‘ Come back, and all will be forgiven. E. P. is a wretch.’ ”

“It is far too serious a subject to jest about,” said Amicia; “but if I thought an advertisement would bring him back, I would put one in at once.”

All this time Count Pantouffles had been bowing to the rest of the party. His bows always went by precedence; he would never have violated etiquette in that or in any other matter. First of all he bowed elaborately to Lady Pennyroyal, then to Lady Charity, as widow of an older baronet than Sir John Sweetapple, and now he was just bowing to Amicia before coming to Mrs. Marjoram and Florry and Alice. When he had solemnly bowed all round, and thus settled, as it were, the preliminaries of his conference, he turned to Lady Sweetapple and said—

“I can tell you something about Mr. Fortescue.”

“Oh, do tell us,” said Amicia and Florry in the same breath.

“First, I will tell of himself,” said the count; and next, I will relate what I have heard of himself.”

“Oh, you spoke to him, then?” said Amicia.

“No, I have not,” said Count Pantouffles; “I only bowed to him yesterday in the Park. He was sitting on a chair smoking, and looking very happy.”

“Very ungrateful of him, I am sure,” said Amicia, “to look happy, when we are all so anxious about him. But I thought you said, count, that you had heard something of himself? How could that be if you did not speak to him?”

“Oh, my lady,” said the count, with an exquisite grin, “you cannot understand. I meant I had heard something about Mr. Fortescue.”

“And, pray, what was it?” said Amicia. “And how did you hear it?”

“I heard it,” said the count, “from my valet, who, when he was brushing my hair last night when I was dressing for dinner, said, ‘You remember Mr. Fortescue, count?’ ‘Yes,’ I said; ‘I do remember him. What about him?’ ‘He is going to be married to a young lady, count. I

heard it from Mr. Beeswing's valet this morning, who heard it from a greengrocer.' ”

“Mr. Beeswing's valet!” said Amicia in despair, for she well remembered that it was from him that Mrs. Crump had first heard of Edith Price.

“I don't believe, begging your pardon, count,” said Mr. Beeswing, “that my valet knows anything about such a marriage. Besides, valets are such gossips—worse than ladies'-maids by far.”

“Even valets tell the truth sometimes,” said Count Pantouffles, with great gravity; “and my valet told me the lady's name, which he said your valet had told him.”

“And the lady's name was——” cried Florry Carlton, anticipating even Amicia in her eagerness.

“Price,” said Count Pantouffles—“Edith Price.”

“Edith Price! why, that's the E. P. of the advertisement!” said Mr. Beeswing.

“Yes, it is,” said Lady Pennyroyal, striking in; “but we know all about that mystery. As soon as the Cup is run for, Mr. Beeswing, I'll tell you the whole story. It is one of which Mr. Fortescue may be justly proud.”

“Here come the horses for the Cup,” said Mr. Beeswing. “Harry Fortescue must wait till the race is run. There they go—Sabinus by New-

minster; he won the City and Suburban and the Metropolitan handicaps at the Epsom Spring Meeting, and the Beaufort Cup at Bath, but he failed at Chester. There comes the French horse, Trocadero—what an odd name, Trocadero!—it's a hill in Paris opposite the Champs de Mars. I wonder if any of you know where it is, and whether we shall ever hear of it again. He's a good horse, but he is six years old, and carries 9 st. 5 lbs. Then there's the Baron's Midsummer with Fordham up. I wonder if he will win. And Lord Wilton's Muster, and Sir J. Hawley's Morna—she won the Oaks, did she not? and Hester—not a bad-looking mare, Hester, with a light weight, 7 st. 2 lbs., the same as Sabinus. Well, I'm all for the young ones and the light-weights. Pantouffles, will you back the old horse Trocadero against the young one Sabinus?"

"What are the odds?" said the count.

"Four to one against Trocadero," said Mr. Beeswing. "I will give you four to one."

"Done," said Count Pantouffles, and the bet was made.

Then came the start, and the finish; and the end was, as you all ought to know, that Trocadero made most of the running, that he was waited on all the way

by Sabinus and Muster, that at the distance Muster was beaten, and that Sabinus soon after quitted Trocadero, and won as he liked in a canter by four lengths.

“I have lost my money,” said Count Pantouffles, gracefully handing over his sovereign to Mr. Beeswing, who took it, and then went to Lady Pennyroyal’s side, who told him the whole story about Harry and Edward’s connection with the Prices. When she had done she asked him what he thought of it.

“I think,” he said, “it’s the most chivalrous story I ever heard. Few young fellows would do such a thing in these times, and few old ones either. It is the more honourable to Harry and Edward because they are neither of them rich. It must have been some sacrifice to them to support that family.”

At the same time Amicia had been extracting all she could out of Count Pantouffles as to Harry’s marriage, but that “all” amounted to very little. The count was positive that Mr. Beeswing’s valet had told his valet that a greengrocer had told him that Mr. Fortescue was going to be married to Miss Edith Price, and that was all he could tell.

At this period of the discussion Mr. Beeswing was again taken into counsel. Did he know anything

about it? Had he ever heard of such a thing? No, he had not.

“But my valet is a very clever fellow,” he said, “and hears many things which I do not. I am afraid he is much more up to the marriages which are about to take place than his master is.”

“But to marry a nobody,” said Florry, with a spiteful glance at Amicia.

“And a governess,” added Amicia. “I never can believe it.”

“Nor can I,” said Florry, which was remarkable as being the only opinion which she shared in common with Amicia.

“Oh, for that matter,” said Mr. Beeswing, “if you take to those arguments it will be easy to confute you, and prove you to be wrong. You don’t understand men. They are very different from women. They would marry a nobody or a governess as soon as look at them, and sooner. There is nothing that a man in love can’t and won’t do. So pray let us have no more against Harry’s marrying Miss Price, if she is nice, respectable, and beautiful, were she twenty nobodies and forty governesses.”

“He has too much self-respect,” said Florry.

“Too much good taste,” said Amicia, coming back to the old arguments.

“I would give a good deal to see any one who had seen this young lady,” said Mr. Beeswing. “Here you, Edward Vernon, come out of that extremely warm corner where you have been sitting all the day and tell us something. You know Miss Price, and have seen her often. Is she very good-looking?”

“I am sure I cannot tell,” said Edward. “She used to be very good-looking as a child, but I have not thought of thinking her beautiful since she grew up.”

“Did you ever hear of a poor fellow so hopelessly in love? Take him away with you into your corner, Miss Alice, with his ‘thought of thinking.’ He is just like a lover, always using words in a non-natural sense. But I repeat it, I would give a great deal to see some one who has seen this young lady, and will tell us rationally and quietly what she is like.”

“I have seen her,” said Amicia, unable to restrain a sudden impulse.

“You seen her!” said Florry, in wonder.

“Yes, I have seen her, and so has Lady Charity. It was I who persuaded Lady Charity to get Miss Price that situation in Norfolk as a governess,” said Amicia.

“Why, then, you also are to be reckoned among the benefactors of the Price family,” said Mr. Bees-

wing satirically ; “ but I shall not take your opinion of Miss Price ; you feel too much interest in her to be impartial. I shall go and ask Lady Charity.”

With these words he left Amicia regretting that she had made that confession, and went to Lady Charity and said—

“ Tell me now, Lady Charity, you have seen Miss Edith Price ? ”

“ I have seen her,” said Lady Charity.

“ And is she respectable and ladylike ? ”

“ Perfectly so,” said Lady Charity. “ She is most ladylike, and her history will bear the strictest investigation.”

“ One question more,” said Mr. Beeswing. “ Is she good-looking ? ”

“ She is without exception one of the loveliest young women I ever saw,” said Lady Charity ; “ a girl that any man might fall in love with ; a good linguist too, and very accomplished in music.”

“ Well, then,” said Mr. Beeswing, looking round on all the faces in the box which were turned towards him during this cross-examination—“ well, then, what reason in the world is there that Harry Fortescue should not marry Edith Price if he chooses it, and why should not this gossip between the valets be well-founded ? ”

“You came in here to be a witness,” said Amicia, bitterly, “and you end by being a judge.”

“Yes; but I am not a judge in my own case,” said Mr. Beeswing. “I only wished to prove that Harry Fortescue has a perfect right to marry any woman he pleases, if she is ladylike and respectable and she has taken his fancy. But when to this is added the undoubted fact, out of your own mouths, that this young lady is very lovely, why, I should say, looking at all the facts of the case, and the sad sympathy which is now sure to spring up between them, that there was every probability of Harry’s marrying her. That is just about what it comes to. Don’t you think so, Lord Pennyroyal?” for that worthy peer had been present at this part of the discussion.

“I know nothing of probabilities,” said Lord Pennyroyal; “but I think every man should please himself in marrying. As to his affording it, I do not know. He has enough for himself, and she, I believe, has nothing. If he marries her, he will have to economise, and that is always a good thing.”

With this thoroughly Pennyroyal dictum, the whole party quitted the Charity box, Amicia and Florry perfectly furious with Mr. Beeswing for taking Edith’s part, and both of them still further

depressed by the bad news which that empty Count Pantouffles had brought.

“I don’t like Mr. Beeswing, Alice,” said Florry. “He always frightens me so when he begins to talk of Miss Price.”

“He needn’t have raised himself up to be such a champion for that young person,” said Amicia to Lady Charity. How much better Mr. Vernon behaved ; he sat still, and would not say a word in her defence.”

The fact is, poor Edward was bound over to Florry’s side by his love for Alice.





CHAPTER XXVI.

WILL EDITH PRICE MARRY HARRY FORTESCUE ?

YES — that was settled : Harry Fortescue had every right to marry Edith Price if he chose ; but would Edith Price choose to marry him ? Marriage is a matter in which women always have the last word, as indeed they have it in so many other matters ; and would Edith Price say that last little word “ Yes ? ” Even at this late period of our story that remains to be seen. On Thursday afternoon, at the very time that Count Pantouffles was declaring that he was engaged to marry Edith Price, Harry Fortescue was in Lupus Street, paying a visit to Edith and Mary, but not one word did he say of love ; he felt at all events that his lips were sealed on that subject till after the funeral. It was not quite so sad a visit as that of the day before, and the sisters were more resigned to their loss. There was not much conversation ; and whenever it flagged, Harry Fortescue consoled him-

self by looking at Edith and repeating his confession of faith in her loveliness both of mind and body. He was grateful to her for being so grateful to him; grateful also to Mary, for rendering his visits possible; and, in the end, he went away still more in love than ever.

But what of Edith? Was she more in love, or at all in love, with Harry Fortescue? We have seen that her gratitude to Harry was rather a hindrance to her love. She would have loved him long ago had she not respected him so much. He was her ideal of all that was noble and generous—a god or providence to her. Now a woman may make an idol of a man and then marry him; but what woman would ever think of marrying a god? One or two of the old Greek women tried it, and we know what happened to them. They were burnt up, like Semele, by the terrible attributes of the object of their affections, or they came in other ways to grief, and not to matrimony. But still there was one chance for Harry, and that was the fact that this providence of the Price family had shown himself mortal. The divinity had come down from his pedestal, and shown himself to be, after all, only a man with passions like any other man. Edith's reverence for Harry Fortescue received its first

blow when he made her that offer; and though she refused him on the spot, we have seen that she quite felt she had refused a noble heart. But when she had made that reflection, and so confessed a leaning towards him, she put the feeling aside, as one quite impossible to be entertained or encouraged, at any rate, for the present. Her first duty was towards her mother and her memory, and so long as those sad relics remained up-stairs, Edith Price could think of nothing but her grief. Nay, she even went further.

"He is very kind," she said to Mary; "but we will not trouble him long. When it is over, I will go back to Blickling, and you must go to school, Mary. But we shall be independent, for I shall earn enough money to maintain us both."

And then the two sisters embraced each other and burst into tears; for Edith knew how bitter it would be for her now to part from Mary, and Mary thought she would rather do anything than leave Edith and go to school.

"It can't be helped, you know," said Edith. "It is our duty, and it must be done."

So Thursday went by, and Friday came—Friday, the last day of the races and the last day before the funeral. According to the newspapers, the last day

of the Ascot meeting in 1870 was "unquestionably the most agreeable of the four." There had been rain, in the first place, and the dust was laid. That alone was enough to mark Friday with a white stone, for a day without dust at Ascot is as rare as the phoenix was in the days when there were phoenixes, a bird now denied to us, along with so many other blessings, because of our unbelief. Then the racing was very good, and every one was in a good temper; but, for all that, we are quite sure that Amicia and Florry Carlton found that Friday anything but agreeable. The party all met as usual in the Charity box, but Florry and Amicia only met as wild beasts meet when they fall into the same pitfall—

"A common feeling makes them wondrous kind,"

and under that feeling they forbore from tearing one another to bits, or, what is the same thing in women, from picking one another to pieces. Lady Pennyroyal and Lady Charity were pleasant and genial as ever, but they were getting sick of the races, and felt that they were only there to forward Edward Vernon's suit to Alice Carlton. They, at least, were thoroughly happy, and rather wished the races would last for ever. As for Lord Pennyroyal and the Marjorams, they were defaulters on

that day. As the slang phrase is, they failed to put in an appearance. Lord Pennyroyal had heard of a model farm in the neighbourhood which an enterprising London agriculturist had made out of the waste, and, after sowing it with sovereigns in trenching and fencing and road-making, he had actually sowed a hundred acres of it with Lord Pennyroyal's favourite crop.

"I would rather see a good crop of sugar-beet," said Lord Pennyroyal at breakfast, "than all the races that were ever run. I tell you what, Marjoram, let us walk over and see it."

"I am quite ready," said Mr. Marjoram.

"And mayn't I come too?" said Mrs. Marjoram.

"I should like it so much."

"But will you be able to walk so far, my dear?" said Mr. Marjoram. "It is four miles there."

"And four miles back," said Mrs. Marjoram. "I can walk that distance easily."

So that was settled, and the three trudged off through Swinley to Easthampstead to see the sugar-beet, and deserted the races.

Till the last moment of the last day, Amicia and Florry had buoyed themselves up with the hope that, after all, Harry Fortescue would return for

that last evening. Florry had even gone so far in her calculations as to confide to Alice—

“But, after all, what is the good of his returning now? He would spend all his time with that odious woman, and go back to town with her to-morrow. I should have no good out of him. No; on the whole, I hope he will not come.”

“Ah, darling,” said Alice, “I am afraid you say that because the grapes are sour. How I wish you were as happy as I am.”

But, though they both buoyed themselves up with the hope, hope is very often as treacherous as those bladders which bear bad swimmers out of their depth and then desert them to drown. Harry Fortescue did not return to Ascot, and both hope and apprehension about him, or what he would do, were in vain. The races came to an end, and Florry Carlton and Amicia, the wild beasts, left their pitfall and retired, the one over the heath to Ouzelmere, and the other along the road to Heath Lodge, to spend the evening in pouting and sulking, and in bad resolutions of the retribution they would take on Harry Fortescue as soon as they met him.

“I will never speak to him again,” said Amicia to Lady Charity.

“Oh yes, you will, my dear,” said Lady Charity.

"I know you better. You will speak to him as soon as you see him."

"I will never bow to him in the Row," said Florry to Alice. "I will never dance with him; I don't think him worth dancing with."

"Pray do not say such dreadful things, darling," said Alice, whose tears, like water in some soils, were always rather near the surface. "You will make me cry if you go on so."

"I don't care if I do," said Florry savagely. "Why should you be so happy while I am so miserable?"

"Don't reproach me for loving Edward," said Alice; "it really is not my fault."

As she said this she threw her arms round her sister, and first she wept and then Florry wept; not softly like Alice, but in great, heavy thunder drops of tears which rolled slowly down her cheeks.

It is really so dull at Ascot that we must rush back to town only to find Harry Fortescue calling on the Prices. They were very sad, so that we have not made an exchange for the better in coming back to London. It was the last day that remained to them with all that remained of their mother. Next morning Mr. Nail was to come to perform his melancholy office, and then the sisters would be left alone on the earth.

There was little or no conversation ; it flagged much more than it had done the day before. There the three sat, the girls sobbing and speaking now and then in a broken voice, and Harry gazing at Edith. Why did he go to visit them ? What a heartless question ! Was he not the only friend except Edward Vernon that they had on earth ? and you all know why Edward Vernon could not visit them. Harry Fortescue was, therefore, quite justified in going to see the sisters every day. It was a comfort to them, and he would have been a brute not to go. Besides, was he not in love with Edith ? You see, therefore, he had every reason to go, and even Mr. Leek on this melancholy occasion refrained from reviling him to Mrs. Leek as " a hinsolent arysticrat."

And all this time Edith was growing more and more grateful to Harry, fearing him less and respecting him less : growing in love with him you will say, but we do not say so ; we only beg you to wait and see.

But before Harry Fortescue left the Prices that evening he had something to say, and he said it.

" I shall be here to-morrow at eleven," he said, " and go with *Her* to the cemetery."

He said "Her" instead of "It" because he had a heart, but that little word was enough to throw both the sisters into tears.

"We are both going with her too," said Edith, sobbing. "It is so good of you to go with us."

Then Harry felt he could do no more for them that day, and left them with his heart in his throat, and went down to the club and wrote as follows to Edward Vernon :—

"MY DEAR NED,

"I am afraid you must think I have been behaving very badly, especially as I have not answered your kind letter."

We ought to have said that Edward had written to Harry on Wednesday night expressing his sorrow at Mrs. Price's death, and begging Harry to return if possible on Thursday or Friday. But the letter went on—"I have been very busy with the Prices, and there has been much to arrange about the funeral, besides trying to comfort them in their loneliness. To-morrow is the funeral, and then something must be settled as to their future plans. I do not think it will ever do for Edith to return to Norfolk and leave Mary alone. I wish you would think over the matter and

give me your advice. I suppose we shall soon meet. Do you return to-morrow? With many apologies to the ladies, and kind remembrances to both,

“Believe me,

“Ever yours,

“HARRY FORTESCUE.”

“There!” said Harry, as he put a stamp on the letter, “that is all I mean to tell him at present. If Edith had accepted me, it would be quite another matter. What a stupid thing a refusal is when it prevents a man taking his best friend into his confidence!”

Then he dropped the letter into the pillar-post, and walked about the streets in a restless way till midnight.

“Twelve o'clock! I must get home, or Mrs. Boffin will think I am returning to my late hours. I shall be glad when that dreadful duty is over to-morrow.”

So Harry Fortescue went back to Mrs. Boffin's as fast as he could, and was soon in bed.



CHAPTER XXVII.

THE FUNERAL AND WHAT FOLLOWED.

WHEN Edward Vernon received Harry For-tescue's letter on Saturday morning he was in no little difficulty, and for a very good reason. Harry evidently expected him in town to obtain his advice, and yet Edward had accepted an invitation from Lady Pennyroyal the night before to return with them to Farthinghoe Castle and spend a few days. This was so kindly meant that Edward had felt he had no choice in the matter, and he knew Alice would be angry with him if he refused. How, therefore, could he go to town to give Harry the benefit of his advice?

Amicia was not down when he received the letter. She was sulking in bed, we believe; but dear Lady Charity was there ready to make breakfast for Edward. She saw his perplexity at once, and asked him what it was. The tender-hearted Edward made a clean breast of it, and took her into his confidence.

“It wouldn’t so much matter if it could be at all arranged that Miss Price should stay in town for a few days. If she put off her return to Blickling for a week, one would have time to turn round and consider the matter. As it is, she will be gone before I get back to town.”

You already know that Lady Charity was the kindest and most sympathetic woman in the world. So that the object was really right and proper, she would do anything to serve her friends, and she had taken very much both to Harry and Edward, particularly when she heard how nobly they had behaved towards the Price family.

“And so you very much wish Miss Price to remain in town a few days?”

“I do very much wish it,” said Edward. “We shall then be able to see what is best to be done for them.”

“They can never stay in that dull, wretched house where they lost their poor mother,” said Lady Charity. “If they do they will never recover their spirits.”

“I should think they needed a change very much,” said Edward.

“How would it do if I were to write to Miss Price, whom I already know and like extremely,

and ask her to come with her sister and stay a week in my house before she returns to Norfolk? I am sure I can arrange it all with Mrs. Blickling."

"I should say you were an angel if I did not know it already," said Edward warmly.

"So many people have called me 'angel' lately," said Lady Charity laughing, "that I begin to be afraid of the name. As for Amicia, I am sure I don't know what she will call me if she hears what I am going to do. But never mind, it is the right and charitable thing to do, and I mean to do it."

"I am sure Harry Fortescue will be charmed, whatever Lady Sweetapple may be," said Edward. "If you write at once Miss Price will get your letter to-night."

"Then there's no time to lose," said Lady Charity.

And so they both sat down and scribbled off their letters, and Edward ran away with them to the post, and just reached it before the box closed.

"That was a near thing," he said; "but never mind, there they are in the box, and Harry will get mine to-night. He will be disappointed, I know, but it can't be helped; and then that dear Lady Charity's letter will cheer him up when he learns from Edith of the proposed arrangement. Of course she will accept it."

Then he returned and had his breakfast, and found Amicia still up-stairs. As Lady Charity poured out his tea, she said—

“Do you know, Mr. Vernon, I think it will be just as well not to say anything to Lady Sweetapple about my invitation to Miss Price. She will find it out for herself soon enough when she gets back to town.”

“Just as you please,” said Edward. “But I must say I cannot see what Lady Sweetapple can have to say as to your inviting any one to your house.”

“Of course not,” said Lady Charity. “I did not mean that. I only meant that as she is in very low spirits I would not for the world say anything to her likely to make her worse.”

“Oh, I see,” said Edward, proceeding with his breakfast. “Perhaps she might not like it.”

That morning Harry Fortescue rose with a feeling of oppression. Something horrid was about to happen to him: what was it? Oh, that sad function in Lupus Street. He had breakfast at nine; then he rushed out and walked about till ten. Then he went back to Mrs. Boffin’s, and dressed himself in mourning attire. Punctually at five minutes to eleven he was at Mrs. Nicholson’s. The hearse was

already there, and the one mourning-coach which was to convey him and the sisters to Kensal Green. Why dwell on the sad particulars? The heavy coffin was brought down and placed in the hearse; then Harry and the sisters got into the mourning-coach. They crawled through the streets to Kensal Green in the glare of the June sun. The sullen mutes bore the coffin from the hearse into the chapel. The service was read, and the sisters sobbed the responses. Then all that was mortal of Mrs. Price was borne to the grave in that wilderness of tombstones. The handful of dust fell on the coffin. The three took one last look, and the gravediggers threw in the heavy clods. Hand in hand the sisters stood and gazed down, with Harry by their side.

“It is all over,” said Harry; “let us go home.”

“Yes, let us go home,” said Edith in an apathetic voice, for she was stunned by sorrow.

When they reached the mourning-coach, Mary threw her arms round her sister and wept, and said—

“Let us never part, Edith.”

Edith put her tenderly on one side, and got into the coach first to hide her feelings, for her heart was too full. Harry put Mary in and got

in himself. In another moment the gloomy vehicle was rumbling back on its way to Lupus Street.

When they reached No. —, Harry left them to themselves. "I will come back to see you this afternoon," he said, and he was gone.

When he went back about four o'clock, he found Edith strangely resigned and full of her plans for the future. Almost her first words were—

"I must go back to Blickling directly, and Mary must go to school. On Monday I must see about it."

"It is very soon," said Harry.

"The sooner the better," said Edith. "I will no longer be a burden to you."

"But you are no burden," remonstrated Harry. "It is a pleasure and a duty to help you and your sister."

But for all that he could do or say, Edith was firm, or seemed to be firm, and Harry went away in despair. Before he left, he said—

"You will let me take you to St. Barnabas tomorrow?"

"Certainly, if you wish it," said Edith; and Harry Fortescue left them, feeling more completely wretched than he had ever been in his life.

“She is very hard-hearted, I am afraid,” he said. “She might have been a little kinder and stayed in town a little longer.”

But Edith Price was not hard-hearted, and she was only so firm because she felt if she gave way an inch she must have yielded altogether. For the first time in her life she was aware that her respect for Harry Fortescue had melted away into love, and yet she was afraid of him.

“Why are you so afraid of Mr. Fortescue, Edith dear?” said Mary, looking up into her sister’s face.

“Because I *am* afraid of him,” said Edith. “He is too good and too kind, and I cannot bear it.”

It fortunately happened that the conversation of the sisters was interrupted by Mrs. Nicholson, who insisted on their having a good tea and going to bed soon.

“Mr. Fortescue, when he went away, told me to look after you, Miss Edith, and I mean to do it. What with want of sleep and food you’re worn to a shadow.”

“How can I sleep or eat,” said Edith, “when I have no friends in the world but Mr. Fortescue and Mr. Vernon?”

“I think if I were you, Miss Edith, and I had

only one friend in the world, and that friend was Mr. Fortescue, I should be as happy as a queen," said Mrs. Nicholson. And then the good woman went on—

"But my orders is positive. You're to have a good tea and go to bed early, and Mr. Fortescue is coming to see you in the morning, and hopes to find you both much better. Bless my heart alive, if that isn't a pull at the bell. It never can be Mr. Nicholson come to look after 'the bank.'"

With these words Mrs. Nicholson ran down to the door, only to find that the postman had pulled the bell, and to run up again with the letter.

"Fancy my being so scared! But I always am scared a-Saturdays, when I think of Mr. Nicholson. It's only a letter for you, Miss Edith."

"A letter for me!" said Edith. "From whom can it be?" and she opened it mechanically.

Her face showed so much astonishment, that Mary at once wanted to know what it was.

"How ungrateful I was," said Edith, "to say that I had no friends. Here is a letter from that kind Lady Charity, who got me the situation, asking you and me, Mary, to spend a few days with her in London, before I go back to Norfolk."

"Oh, Edith," said Mary, "I am so glad we shall

not be parted and I shall not go to school yet, and we shall both see Mr. Fortescue."


"Hush!" said Edith; "not so fast, Mary. We will have tea, and go to bed and think of it. I must ask Mr. Fortescue's advice before accepting Lady Charity's very kind invitation."

With this wise resolution, the sisters took some food and went to bed. They felt lonely and wretched, all alone in the house, which, though it had ceased to be the house of mourning, was still so because they had been separated from their mother; but they were worn and weary, and were soon sound asleep, locked in each other's arms.

When Harry Fortescue got home, he too was comforted by a letter from Edward, explaining why he could not come to town that day and give him the benefit of his advice, and ending thus:—

"But, after all, it does not much matter, old fellow; for Lady Charity, with her usual kindness, has written to ask the Prices to stay with her a few days before Edith returns to Norfolk, so that we shall have plenty of time to consider what is best to be done for them."

When Harry Fortescue had read as far as this, he threw down the letter and burst out as so many others had done—



“Why, this dear Lady Charity is a downright angel!”

What he did with himself between Saturday evening and church-time on Sunday is not known. No doubt he spent it in the way so satisfactory to lovers and so unsatisfactory to the rest of the world, in wandering up and down the streets and thinking of Edith Price. But on Sunday morning he was in Lupus Street at ten o'clock; and, having run the fire of Mr. Leek's tongue, he was soon after on his way to St. Barnabas, in time for the half-past ten service. This time, however, the church was so full that they all had to go over to the men's side, and sit together in the side aisle. It was shame and mortification to the verger to see the sheep thus mixed with the goats; but he has to bear it every Sunday in June, and perhaps it is one of the trials specially sent to prove his faith.

But, whatever the verger thought, Harry Fortescue thought it very nice, and—must we own it?—Edith thought it nice too. She thought it very pleasant to sit and kneel and stand side by side with Harry, to bow when he bowed, and to sing out of the same hymn-book. For years the iron had entered into her soul, and now a stronger than iron had cast it out. Love had stolen in, at first as a

little fancy, no bigger, and seemingly quite as harmless, as a tiny child. Young ladies say, "Let the boy in, we can always control him; ours are well-regulated minds." But when he is once in, he grows and grows so fast, the boy is man and master in a week, and carries all before him; and so it was with Edith Price.

We cannot say she was very attentive to her devotions. No woman can do two things at once, whatever men may be able to do. If a woman is in love, she is all in love; and the more she tries not to love, the more she loves. So Edith, when she said her prayers, saw not "Amen" at the end of each of them, but "Harry." Sometimes, too, she saw "Harry" in the middle of them, and, worse than all, at the beginning; and when the sermon came, and she tried to listen to the preacher, it was all the same. The end and object of his discourse seemed to be the saving grace of faith in Fortescue. Was not that a sad position for a young lady? And how was poor Edith Price either to get love out of her heart, or Harry Fortescue out of her head? So convinced was she of the absurdity of ever attempting to do this, that at last she gave up thinking of anything else, and thought of nothing but Harry Fortescue. Who shall talk of a "well-

regulated mind," when one so staid and demure as Edith could offer no resistance to the enemy when he had once thrust one of his tiny feet through the chink in the door of her heart?

It was very pleasant, and they both wished, like Edward Vernon in the Charity box, that the service would last for ever. Edith was firmly convinced that she could sit there, soaring up on majestic organ-tones into an Elysium in which she might devote herself to contemplation of Harry Fortescue. That you call idolatry; but, in reality, love is nothing but another name for idolatry. It is man and woman worship in its purest form. Sometimes it takes a philosophic shape, and says, "I believe in such and such an one, therefore I am." It refuses even so much as to recognise its own identity save in the object of its affections. Dear me! all this is very silly, but so natural!

So, then, Harry and Edith walked home from St. Barnabas just a fortnight after they had first walked thither, and in that short time Love had worked all this havoc in their hearts.

"I have had such a nice kind letter from Lady Charity," said Edith.

"I know you have," said Harry, almost roughly; "and of course you mean to accept the invitation?"

Supposing Edith Price had not been in love with Harry Fortescue, she would have been offended at a speech which was almost bearish in allowing her no choice of her own. Had she been fancy-free, unfettered, and independent, she would have asserted her dignity and gone down to Norfolk next morning. But we know that she was not free; she bowed before Harry, and looked on him in her heart already as her lord and master, and so she answered meekly—

“I will do whatever you advise, Mr. Fortescue.”

“If you will take my advice, Edith,” said Harry, “you will stay in town.”

This he said quite carelessly, as though he were feeling the ground and wishing to see what Edith would say to the liberty. But Edith said nothing to it, she was too far gone already.

“Your advice has always been best for us,” said Edith, this time omitting the Mr. Fortescue.

“Well, then,” said Harry, “I suppose we may consider it settled you will stay with Lady Charity. It will give us all time to think.”

“It will,” said Edith. “Mary and I will stay. How sorry dear Mrs. Nicholson will be to lose us.”

“Every one would be sorry to lose you, Edith,” said Harry.

See, he had called her Edith again, without any qualification—plain Edith, bare Edith, call it what you will; and Edith Price accepted it, and said nothing, but she looked full at Harry, and Harry Fortescue for the first time saw, from the joy in her eyes, that Edith Price was in love with him.

He left them at the door, having seen enough, and went home to Mrs. Boffin's a happier man than he had ever felt in his life.

“Why, this is life at last,” he said. “If Edward Vernon feels at all like this, he must be happy.”





CHAPTER XXVIII.

IN WHICH ALL FIND THEIR PLACES.

AND now our story has almost come to an end. Like the old year on the 31st of December, there is very little more life left in it. Of course, when Amicia came up to town and found that Lady Charity, her best friend, had actually asked Edith Price, "the dark young lady in the background," to stay with her, she was furious. Lady Charity was a traitor, a renegade, a go-between, and what not. But you must remember that she could not say this to Lady Charity herself; and in nothing did Lady Charity more resemble the virtue from which she took her name than in caring nothing for what was said behind her back. Mrs. Crump indeed declared, as she brushed my lady's hair, "that Lady Charity's conduc' was monstrous — to go and 'arbour a young person like that was 'orrible." But it really mattered very little what Mrs. Crump thought or said; and though

Mrs. Grimalkin held up her hands, or her paws, too, and said it was "shameful, and against all the usages of society," Lady Charity cared nothing for such gossip, for she had many more friends than Mrs. Grimalkin, and all her friends said her conduct was worthy of Charity itself.

But pray remember Amicia had an excuse. She really loved Harry Fortescue, and had set her heart, as we have seen, on having him. But if there is one lesson in life which many if not all of us must learn, it is this, that very often neither men nor women can marry those they love. And so Amicia Sweetapple had to live on and love on and bear the blow as she best could. All this happened only in 1870. You may see her about everywhere, as lovely as ever. She is still under thirty, and if any young man about or even under that age comes forward, and Amicia likes him as much as she liked—we will not now say "loved"—Harry Fortescue, he may become the husband of a very lovely and charming widow with a large income all at her own disposal. But then he must not be so silly, or so wise, as to fall in love with an Edith Price, a mere governess, by the way.

What do we say to Florry Carlton? Very little. No words of ours can do her any good. To her the

blow was much worse than to Amicia. She was tenderer at heart; not so passionate, perhaps, for she was not near thirty, but with far deeper feelings and a less schooled mind. We pity her from the bottom of our hearts. But what can pity do in such a case? It rather adds insult to injury. Even the happiness of her sister, who was married the Christmas after to Edward Vernon, is an eyesore to her; it reminds her how happy she too might have been with Harry. Fortunately she has gone out little since those Ascot Races. Perhaps she may recover, but she will always be one of what used to be called the broken hearts of society. In old times they were broken right in two, and people died of them, but now they can be healed, and some say they are stronger and softer for being broken. All that we know is, that as every set of china has several cracked plates, so every set in society has such broken hearts, not of women only, but of men. It is a mistake, too, to fancy that men's hearts are not just as brittle as women's; sometimes they are much brittler. But for all these poor things there are consolations and comforts — Time, Religion, Death. Let us leave Florry Carlton to one or all of these, and pass on. We think, whatever Amicia Sweetapple may do, Florence Carlton will never

marry. Like a rose cankered in the bud, she will never bloom as a bride. You say, "Never is a long day." So it is. We shall see.

Let us pass on. You have heard nothing as yet of Harry Fortescue and Edith Price. All that remains to be said of them is, that Lady Charity was in possession of Edith's secret before she had stayed with her two days.

"I am sure he does not know it," said Edith. "And then, I refused him."

"I am not so sure that he does not know it," said Lady Charity, to whom Harry had already told what he had guessed from Edith's eyes.

Then, like a gossip, as charity often is, Lady Charity went and told Harry; and more than that, when Harry came she left them together alone, and Harry stayed two hours, and Edith only thought it a quarter of an hour; and the day after he came, and as soon as he saw her he called her "dearest Edith" all at one jump, and proposed, and was accepted. "Ah, but you have not told us half enough," some of you will say. Well, if you are so unreasonable and coarse-minded, and seek to pry into the mysteries of love—for his rites are as mysterious and fortunately far more pure than those of Samothrace—you deserve to be struck blind, and

must go to some other work of fiction than this. We tell you that within that week Harry and Edith were engaged to each other, and before the month was out they were married. Whether many clergymen assisted, or the service was "full choral," we cannot say; but we are sure there were no cards, and so that important fact was not put into the advertisement of the ceremony. Edith Price was married from Lady Charity's house, and Mr. Beeswing gave the bride away. We should not wonder if when old Lady Charity died she left Mrs. Fortescue all her money. But what you will all of you wonder at, as we wonder at it as we write it, is this. The day before his marriage Harry Fortescue received a letter from Lord Pennyroyal, in which he simply said that he thought his noble conduct towards the Price family deserved some acknowledgment from those in a position to make it, and so he had sent Harry Fortescue a little present on his marriage. And what do you think it was? Why, a cheque on Lord Pennyroyal's bankers for £10,000. This you will all consider, we hope, very handsome; but before Harry could recover his surprise, which he had not done when he reached Lady Charity's, he found Edith in equal astonishment. Lord Pennyroyal had sent her a little present too, which he said

would enable her to maintain her independence, as well as pay for her dress, and that little something was another cheque for £10,000. So you are all bound to apologise to Lord Pennyroyal, and to confess with Lady Pennyroyal—who knew him so much better—that though stingy in small matters, he was a man capable of great acts of generosity. We hope you will none of you think either Harry or Edith proud when we add that they returned both cheques to Lord Pennyroyal, expressing their grateful sense of his munificence, which at the same time they felt bound to decline. Since then Harry has been making his way at the “Bar” in spite of the attorneys’ sons.

The Barkers are still the same loving couple, and the Marjorams rival them in devotion to one another. Since that sudden conversion at Ascot, Mrs. Marjoram has never lapsed; she is too good a Calvinist for that. Mr. Beeswing is as genial and cheery as ever; and as for Count Pantouffles, what is there to be said of him, but that if you go any day into the Park between one and two or six and seven, you will see him bowing as exquisitely as ever. He at least knows what he is fit to do, and does it. And so we too make our bow to our gentle readers. If any one asks why some of our characters

are left so happy while others remain so wretched, all we can say is that the skein of life is tangled black and white, and as we have found life so we paint it. When even Providence has not the power, but only the will, to make all men happy, how can a mere writer of fiction be so presumptuous as to dare to paint all clouds in rose-colour, and leave all his creatures happy ?

THE END.





